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ALAN WEISS

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#33

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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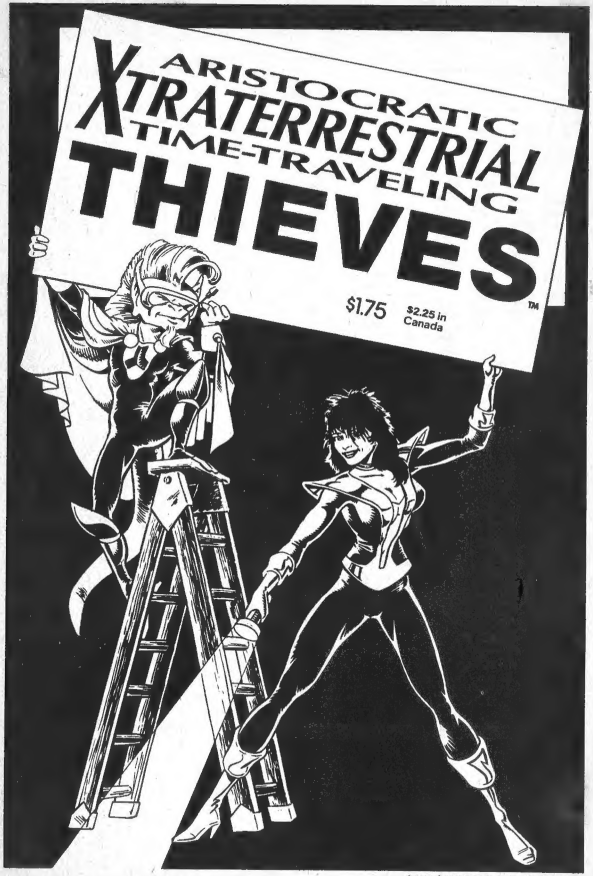

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UP FRONT

What does a publisher actually do, anyway? That's a question I get asked every so often. It was bad enough when I just wrote comics—no matter how you attempt to explain it, most people just can't get it through their heads that comics aren't the sole work of an artist. Right after you introduce yourself as a comics writer, folks outside the field will come back with, "Oh, so you draw comics." It's a cross—a curse—every comics writer has to bear including, I'm sure, **Stan Lee** even after all these years.

Anyway, as if that weren't a difficult enough concept to get across to people, explaining what a publisher does is a challenge of another magnitude altogether.

The first reaction is usually, "Oh, so you *print* the comics." While this is, in an abstract way, a truth of sorts, publishers are not, generally speaking, printers. Nor are we the monsters (excepting, of course, **Gary Groth**) we're usually made out to be (as in, "I really didn't want to team up Hawkman and Swamp Thing, but the publisher made me do it.") J. Jonah Jameson has probably done more damage to the image of publishers in comics than any single other source—which is ironic, when you think about it, since after writing J. Jonah's harangues for many years and helping foster this bad image, **Stan Lee** went on to become a publisher, himself, and thus reap the reputation he had sown.

So what does a publisher do, anyway? Hmm. Good question. I've conveniently run out of room to explain, so I guess I'll have to leave it for another day!

-Dave

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"Steelgrip Starkey's a modern allegorical

AL WEISS

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Alan Lee Weiss
Born: Chicago, 1948, and grew up in Las Vegas
Residence: Manhattan
Occupation: Writer/Artist
Early Credits: I got into comics in '70 and '71 and did fillers and mystery stories. The first full story was for HOUSE OF MYSTERY and then I went on to "El Diablo," an issue of DAREDEVIL, and then "Pellucidar."

Favorite Comics: JUDGE DREDD; MR. MONSTER; GROO; THE SPIRIT; ROCKETEER; TWO-FISTED TALES; PIRACY; ACES HIGH; CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN by Kirby and Woody; Frazetta's THUN'DA.

Favorite Artists: Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, Joe Kubert, John Severin, Wally Wood, Al Williamson, John Buscema, Gene Colan, Neal Adams, Jim Steranko and many many others.

Al Weiss and I are sitting over pistachio nuts and beverages, watching from a bar at the South Street Seaport's Pier 17, as the rain falls on the Brooklyn Bridge and the East River. We're going to be talking about his limited series, STEELGRIP STARKEY, which is about a hero who is a construction worker, about his career in comics, and whatever else comes up...

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *What is a Steelgrip Starkey?*

ALAN WEISS: Well (gestures with arms), he's about this big, he's about this long, and he's about this country. He's a modern allegorical figure — a technological folklore character. I'm kind of writing for the new patriotism with this character. This is a guy that has a lot of the flavor of the clean '50s heroes, the guys that wouldn't punch anybody first or kick 'em when they were down — the "keep 'em flying" kinda guy. I brought two comics that were the inspiration.

DWIGHT: *The first is a copy of CAPTAIN VICTORY #1, which shows Captain Victory holding a couple of huge Kirbyesque weapons, and the other is a copy of GREEN LANTERN #175, which features the Demolition Team.*

ALAN: Steelgrip was originally going to be a redo of the Steel Sterling character from the '40s, but coming up with a new concept, something constructive — that was the first key...

DWIGHT: *I guess literally he turned into something constructive.*

ALAN: He sure as hell did! The idea was: what if these machines in the hands of Captain Victory weren't weapons? What if they weren't guns? That was one spark. Also, whenever people do something about construction characters they're always used offensively. And the Demolition Team in GREEN LANTERN is an example of that. What I was thinking of here was the super power comes from the tool, rather than from the character; but it still took the man and his skill to work the job. We're talking about a modern **John Henry**, but with a positive attitude toward the technology. **John Henry** was trying to beat the machines. I'm saying, have the machines work with you, because that's the positive future as it will be. I felt that I had an original enough idea that I would also give him a new name. By now it had nothing to do anymore with the original concept — all that's left is the red shirt. (*Laughter.*) I put this before **Jim Shooter** and he liked the idea immediately. I was jazzed over the fact that this would allow me to take a whole different angle on the violence aspect. This would definitely be first and foremost an adventure strip — I mean the man is risking his life because he's working with a technology that's so far advanced that it's always going to be risky — but he takes it as his art and he takes it as his job and he doesn't really see himself as a hero. Obviously, he's set up by me to be an all-American archetype — a heroic version of Tom Sawyer grown up and on a scale only equaled by the folklore heroes. There are no supervillains in the strip. He's not a law-

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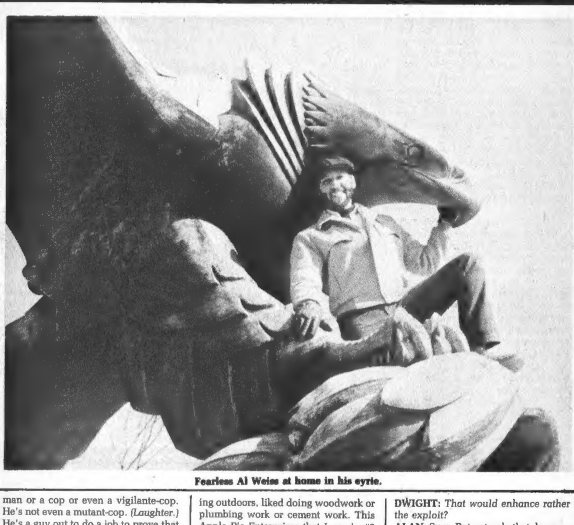
figure — he'd never punch anybody first."



Fearless Al Weiss at home in his eyrie.

man or a cop or even a vigilante-cop. He's not even a mutant-cop. *(Laughter.)* He's a guy out to do a job to prove that a good man with the proper tool can work miracles, and I mean positive miracles, for a change. Superman could do a lot of this stuff, but he'd only do it on the way to capture the villain. With Steelgrip this is the end in itself.

DWIGHT: *I'm looking at the splash page from the first issue, and just from the thematic statements you're making here, it strikes me that you're trying to make this a character book. What you mention here about lunch hour Manhattan: "a million secretaries sweep through revolving doors, and most of them will avoid construction sites at all costs." I've seen the whole scenario in just those lines.*

ALAN: Well, I want to set this up, because people have stereotypical ideas about the construction worker. Steelgrip is a college graduate. He's doing this because he prefers to; just like a lot of the guys I knew on the west coast that liked working with their hands, liked working outdoors, liked doing woodwork or plumbing work or cement work. This Apple Pie Enterprises that I use in #2 was a real company of a bunch of friends of mine, out-of-work artists, actors, musicians, that did freelance construction. It's amazing! I dug a swimming pool with my own hands — four of us did it — and it ruined me for drawing for a couple of weeks but it was a great feeling. It was just so strange. Kilroy was here.

DWIGHT: *It is amazing the kind of satisfaction you can get from doing work with your own hands.*

ALAN: The allegory of that specific feeling is exactly what I'm doing with Steelgrip. His job is his adventure and his art because he's spending the time of his life at it. Let us hope that we all can say the same. That's not a real high-fallutin' sentiment but it sure is a nice one. At the same time I want to capitalize on this recent wave of new American patriotism, but I wanted to do it in a way that I felt was original, had something to add, and wasn't just another RAMBO.

DWIGHT: *That would enhance rather the exploit?*

ALAN: Sure. But not only that, because I thought we had worked through certain of those old ideas $ kill a Comie for Uncle Sam — and here we are doing the same thing, trying to prove in the movies ten years after the fact that we could win the war. It's kinda ridiculous. I like a rowdy adventure strip as much as anyone, in fact probably more than most, and . . . DRASTIC ACTION COMICS is going to be the book I'll be doing two steps down the line . . .

DWIGHT: *For any particular company?*

ALAN: Marvel wants it. The main character is Scuff Ruffin. He's a professional comic-strip character who is a sidekick to a different hero every issue. "Wonderwar" will be a back-up feature to that — it's also the graphic novel I'm working on right now for Marvel. But, Steelgrip Starkey, now there's a name that doesn't sound like your usual avenger-type assassin.

DWIGHT: *It brings to mind a steel grip — but what's a starkey?*

"I'd love to have Steranko do an issue."

ALAN: The *star key*. His name is Starkey and they call the company Star Key Enterprises. As Mr. Pilgrim, the inventor of Technalchemy, the technology that the all-purpose power tool belongs to, says, "The stars are the keys to all things." There's a little occult, a little mysticism, involved here. But as you said, yes, it's a character book, but there are a fixed number of major characters. It doesn't get overly involved, especially in the first six, because I'm sort of escalating, in scope and scale, the tasks that they take on.

DWIGHT: *It sounds like you're anticipating this going beyond the limited series.*

ALAN: That depends on how popular the book is, of course; on what the sales figures are. I would like the series to continue. I have ideas written down for at least twenty more stories. The book is set up so that many different artists could work on it. If we go into another set, then some of the guys who couldn't do it during the first run might actually get in on it. **Mike Kaluta** was supposed to draw #5 but had to bow out . . .

DWIGHT: *You say it's geared so that other artists can draw it . . .*

ALAN: I'd like to keep writing it.

DWIGHT: *How are you structuring things? Do you deliberately try to make an adventure that would work for the particular artist?*

ALAN: Absolutely. **Jim Sherman**, who's inking and coloring all six, is drawing #3 and it's perfectly suited to him. It's outdoors, it's tracking, it's woodsmanship, it's gonna be fantastic. I've asked several other folks to draw issues of STEELGRIP. I'd love to have **Jim Steranko** do an issue. I would like to do at least one or two favorite stories that I have — but I didn't anticipate drawing this strip in the first place.

DWIGHT: *That's sort of unusual because everyone knows you as an artist.*

ALAN: I know, I created this but I don't know if it's *really* right for me artistically. I did have a clear idea of what I wanted it to look like — a distillation of all the **Kirby**, **Gil Kane**, **Steranko** machines I'd ever seen, but different and applicable to this particular kind of animation where the machine can grow before your eyes and then unbuild back down like a film running backwards. I always see it as a **Ray Harryhausen** stop-motion effect. The spirit of it is what's exciting to me. It's a positive application of this level of power for creative work — and in one issue, after realizing they've built something in the wrong place for the wrong reasons, Steelgrip destroys it on the spot.

DWIGHT: *He has integrity.*

BUT ONLY IF THE SOCKS IN EXACTLY THE RIGHT PLACE!
IT IS!
SHEE!? IT'S LIKE A GIANT SLINGY THAT METAL SHEETING STRETCHED BETWEEN THIS SOCK-RESISTS W FLEXIBLE AND ANTI-ACTIVITY-FRICTION!
WE'LL CATCH THE FIREBALL AND HOW IT IN SHEETS OF THIS STUFF--
LOOK WHAT YOU THOU WE JUST BUILT! A GIANT BANDO ALAN!
AND TURN IS TOWN OF FLYING SHARPNESS INTO A GIANT, HANDLESS BALL OF TIN FOIL!!
NOW YOU AND RYAN GO BLAST ANY PROJECTILES OF THE MAN BALL!
GOTCHA COVERED, STEELGRIP!
LOOKS HERE SHE COMES!!!

GO TEAM GO! Steelgrip Starkey and crew field a flying pile of radioactive garbage.

ALAN: He was chosen for that reason. It's very much a King Arthur situation, when he kneels over that tool and grabs the handle. He becomes the power source. The tool has to be programmed by Shari, the female character, so what I've set up is a yin-yang with a mediating force all coming together for new creativity. That's what the allegory is all about: the positive image of the American working man as we used to see it, before we got into the '60s and got cynical, and then downright despondent in the '70s. This is the kind of guy that Uncle Sam could come down and shake his hand and say, "Why, Steelgrip, you've really shown us our true image."

DWIGHT: *This all sounds great and I want to stand up and salute the flag and all, but it also sounds to me like you're trying to bring back a spirit of the kind of comics you were reading when you were young.*

ALAN: Well, that's for certain. This strip

"He's a very positive American hero."

is not mutants an' it's not ninjas. I think of it as a cross between Warner Bros. animation and the old films of the '30s — once they started, they never stopped. The kind of scale that Steelgrip works on... He's propping up the U.N. He's saving parts of South America from earthquakes. But he's risking his life to do it and at first he doesn't think that's what he signed up to do.

DWIGHT: *So this is almost a man against nature...*

ALAN: It's never against. When he realizes that it's "against," he fixes it. His site is the cleanest. He cleans up toxic wastes. You don't have to destroy something to be the hero.

DWIGHT: *You pitched the idea to Jim Shooter a few years ago — what grabbed him about it?*

ALAN: I think it was that it's a very positive American hero. Jim and I had worked with Captain America, we had done a couple of AVENGERS, and I think one of his major strengths is how he can grasp a character and feel what's right for it. He looked at what I gave him and said, "How soon can you do it?" Very supportive.

DWIGHT: *When was that?*

ALAN: That was the beginning of '83.

DWIGHT: *That's a long genesis.*

ALAN: There were a couple of real disappointing delays. We were on the schedule, we were off the schedule. We were going to be bi-monthly, now we're going to be monthly. We lost people that were gonna work on it. And they wanted to have all six issues together before...

DWIGHT: *By "they" are you saying the company wanted all six done?*

ALAN: Or at least pencilled and plotted.

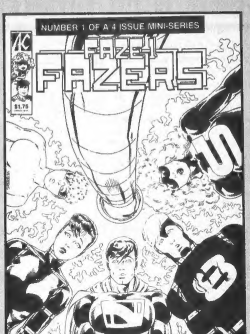
DWIGHT: *Did you envision it as an Epic series or a Marvel series?*

ALAN: It was always going to be Epic. **Jim Starlin**, way back at the beginning of Epic, came to me and said, "Look, this is the time to take some of those California ideas out. Marvel's finally going to do a creator-owned deal." I came up with the concept and we went six months with just lawyers haggling.

DWIGHT: *It must have been very frustrating. Did you ever feel at some point like just chucking the whole deal?*

ALAN: Twice. (Laughter.) But here we are. At the same time I was working on this graphic novel, WONDERWAR, which is a whole different thing. We were almost set to go with STEELGRIP by the end of '84, but **Jim Sherman** had to take a couple of leaves of absence while we were not on schedule, to do things like illustrate the **Joan Rivers** book: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HEIDI ABROMOWITZ. The original deal was

THIS BOOK SOLD OUT! DID YOU GET A COPY?



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"We'll ride the anti-Rambo backlash."

that Jim would ink and color all six issues so they have a consistency, so we did everything to make sure that happened. He's pencilling the third one himself. That's the way the book was planned, and maybe we'll ride the anti-RAMBO backlash a little bit. I'm banking a lot on the positive spirit of this strip. I would like it to be as successful a strip as THE SPIRIT or as JUDGE DREDD or even as MR. MONSTER these days — I get the biggest kick out of that strip. I'd love to draw a story with that guy.

DWIGHT: *How are you getting the word out to people that STEELGRIP STARKEY isn't a generic superhero title?*

ALAN: Steelgrip is "America's hardest working hero," and that's what we want to stress. What I did want made clear is that he's not being a superhero and by the same token he's not just a construction worker. He is a superhero in essence but he has no super powers of himself. The heroism comes out of his personal makeup, as it should — and ultimately has to with any character.

DWIGHT: *I've always felt that the greatest heroes, especially in fiction, were normal people who rose above themselves.*

ALAN: If you want to use the term working-class hero at that level, I think that's exactly what we have here. He's chosen to represent a whole level of folks at that feeling. It doesn't matter what your job is, it's what your attitude to it is — and that's why I've never done a monthly strip.

DWIGHT: *You did the "Pelluciclar" series for DC.*

ALAN: That's one of the things that convinced me I didn't like that kind of a schedule. I decided that if I were to do it, I'd like it to be with my own creations. Steelgrip's my most recent idea and yet he's going to be the first one to hit the stands — because I felt he should be more a series than a graphic novel. WONDERWAR will start out as a graphic novel and continue as the backup feature in DRASTIC ACTION COMICS. The first character that Marvel was interested in was Scuff, but he'll be the third one to come out.

DWIGHT: *This all-purpose power tool — you've shown me illustrations and it's this gigantically complex piece of machinery . . .*

ALAN: It's never the same. Shari, is what we call the technotary. She's far more than just a secretary — she's the essential female spirit and energy. She programs the tool and only she can do it. Its computer will only respond to her — that's to make sure that the tool can never be misused by any one individual, even the hero. It's the difference between white magic and black magic, at that level. They never know what the tool will look like until Steelgrip grabs the handle — Arthur at the sword — and then it builds itself from the sub-atomic level on up, which we call Technalchemy for technological alchemy. It's always changing. It's always new. It doesn't have to be huge to be very powerful. The main point is that when he's finished it builds back down to the main component. It can adapt to whatever the job is — so far we haven't been stumped. We have a couple of surprises coming that I won't divulge now, but I will say that the six issues make a complete story.

AND MORE!
AND IT WAS INVENTED BY A MR. PILGRIM, WHO REFUSES ALL PUBLICITY?
...AND YOU, MISS, YOU'RE THE, AH...?
...AND THERE ARE NO...ROMANTIC LINKS BETWEEN YOU AND MR. STARKEY...?
TECHNOTARY.
NO--NO "ROMANTIC LINKS"--MR. STARKEY AND I ARE EACH AT PRESENT FREE OF SUCH ENTANGLEMENTS, AND OURS IS A PURELY BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP.
CBS
AND RYAN'S LADY IS BACK IN NEW YORK!
...AND YOU REALLY THOUGHT YOUR TOOL COULD HAVE SAVED CHICAGO?

DWIGHT: *Did you find yourself having to fight any superhero biases or prejudices as you were putting this together?*

ALAN: That was the easiest thing. Whatever the superhero did I tried not to do. I tried to put the focus on the things that a lot of superheroes just do as a by-product or don't concern themselves with at all. It's much more at the level of an American folklore character who's constructive rather than destructive. The confrontation is one of energy rather than of hate or revenge.

DWIGHT: *What is this fold-out?*

ALAN: We have a brochure that folds out at the center of issue #1. It's an "advertising" brochure for the all-purpose power tool that tells you what it can do, how it does it, how to get in touch with these people. Star Key Enterprises is set up as an experimantal company for a year — because we were going to be bimonthly and that would be the six issues — and then at that time they'll decide whether they want to renew it. It also mentions in the brochure that we work in space, undersea, on land, in the air; and during the six issue span we do all of those things.

DWIGHT: *How has your relationship with Epic been going?*

ALAN: Just fine. **Margaret Clark** is the editor on the book, and the gal takes care of business. She's very nice. Since last fall when we realized that we were gonna be back on the schedule, in fact, that we would go monthly — that's when

WHEN IS SHE GOING TO TELL HER THOSE SECRET AGENTS WERE TRACK SPRAYING AND WHERE'S SATTA HEY LIN LIN
NATT?
NO, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY HE'D TRANSPLANT SUCH VALUABLE PLANTS TO CHINA WHEN HE COULD BE...
NO
NO
WHAT A UNFORTUNATE SITUATION WE'RE FACING. I BELIEVE YOU'RE RIGHT, DR. LIN LIN. THEY'RE COMMUNISTS!
AS MUCH AS I HATE TO LEAVE YOU, I'LL GO TO LIN LIN'S AND SEE IF SATTA'S BACK.
FINE. WE'LL KEEP IN TOUCH. BE CAREFUL!
WHEN...
TWIN BEDS
IT'S ABOUT TIME SOMEONE DIDN'T LOCK THE DOOR!

MYSTERY
RED
SPIES
ADVENTURE
FLYING
SAUCERS
ROMANCE

ALL THIS AND MORE IN "SECRETS AND INSIDIOUS MACHINATIONS"
THE SILENT INVASION NUMBER TWO

ON SALE IN JUNE FROM Renegade Press

"I treat my comics as my fine art."

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Unpublished IRON MAN cover by AI.

things started speeding up again. We had all the issues in pencil at that point, so now it's just a matter of getting inks and color done, and scripting on the last couple. I drew issue #s 1, 2 and 6. **Sherman** drew #3. **Val Mayerik** did #4 and #5 — which features the possible negative side of Steelgrip, and probably some of the best **Val Mayerik** art you've seen.

If you're asking whether I've had interference on the stories — no. They've been just wonderful, as far as just making sure that what we're doing is appropriate for the character, which is all I really want. We had to submit a synopsis of all six stories at the very beginning because **Archie Goodwin** wanted to get a full picture — and once he understood it and he liked it, then we've been free to go on.

DWIGHT: *There are other comic-related topics I'd like to ask at you, and also bits on your career. What was the thing that kept you in touch with comics? Adver-*

"Jim Starlin and Berni Wrightson don't

Al's pencils of an unpublished Jim Starlin WARLOCK script.

tising work certainly pays a lot more.

ALAN: I said this once before and I hope it's not misunderstood: I treat my comics as my fine art. I put so much into the comics that sometimes it becomes impractical to do the monthly grind — it would certainly be impractical as far as inspiration. But there are those of us who just love the comics and always have and it never stopped. Take a **Dave Stevens** or a **Berni Wrightson**. You don't see their work from time to time — but then something comes out and knocks your socks off. Chances are, they've been developing that idea for years and years. There are a lot of us back there.

DWIGHT: *What's your overall impression of the field right now?*

ALAN: I think it's terrific, very exciting. There's a lot of experimental work that's come and gone. There are these great oddball strips sort of on the parameters of accepted comics that are so delightful, like MR. MONSTER. There are the SPIRIT reprints which I think you can hold up to the best of the latest comics. We're getting a chance to look at foreign work — British, French. I'm a big **Moebius** fan. Graphic novels.

DWIGHT: *So you don't feel that there are too many comics on the market?*

ALAN: The cream's gonna rise to the top and it has a lot to do with how true the spirit is, you know? You look at ROCKETEER and you know that the man's soul went into it.

DWIGHT: *What do you think holds comics back from being a more popular form of entertainment?*

ALAN: As usual, it's the old-time cliches, they're trash, they're for kids. We've already risen above them but they're still there. I do believe, however, that there is, because of the comics stores and direct sales, a greater number of older folks looking at these comical books — as we like to call them on the west coast. Calling them comical books kind of heightens the surrealistic aspects where you're not only looking at them at the level that you saw them when you were 14, but with the added perspective of being older.

DWIGHT: *I remember when I was a kid buying STAR-SPANGLED WAR STORIES with all those really improbable tales of soldiers fighting dinosaurs and it always bothered me. Why do these things? I hated 'em!*

ALAN: That's because when we were kids there was a point when we got "scientific" and we knew that people couldn't breathe on Venus and that the dinosaurs died out at a certain time,

let the star nonsense get to them."

Then you go full circle and come back around to where you accept it again at the surrealistic level. "I know this is ridiculous but I'm going to have a good time with it." If you don't have that attitude then you can't enjoy underground comics, you can't enjoy anything in HEAVY METAL. You've gotta be able to let it go a little bit.

DWIGHT: *The suspension of disbelief?*

ALAN: Sure. They're crazy and they're wonderful. What about reading a **Craig Russell**? You have to let your eyes just follow those lines and get into it and go for it. **Wrightson** never could understand how I could enjoy drawing a romance book as much as drawing "Pellucuidar" — but I'd seen **Steranko**'s romance job, a couple of **Gray Morrow** jobs, some things that **Neal Adams** did, and I had a great time. It was a relief from having to do the stock superhero. I didn't ever want to get pigeonholed as just superheroes or whatever the last thing I did was.

DWIGHT: *What do you think has been the greatest change that has helped improve comics?*

ALAN: When they're not scared; they loosen up and try new styles, something crazy like MOONSHADOW or THE ONE — both accessible to not just the regular fan, but with some terrific new ideas and new ways of telling them. You have to bring a certain amount of yourself to them. STEELGRIP, I feel, is pretty much accessible to everybody — there's nothing obscure. I would like it to be accessible to anybody reading their first comic or someone who's been reading comics for 30 years — have enough of the right spirit so when you put the book down you say, "Now that was a good ride. I got my money's worth. It's a book I'll be able to look at again in ten years." That's what **Wrightson** and **Kaluta** and **Brunner** and **Smith** and all of us in the early '70s were trying to do — just take all of that love that we had for the ECs and the early DCs and Marvels and try . . . **Starlin** really pulled it through with some full series — taking the awe that he had and saying, "I'm going to go even harder."

DWIGHT: *You did some inking on one of his* WARLOCKs, *I believe?*

ALAN: Sure. There's a whole issue of WARLOCK that I drew that was never published. Jim keeps saying, "Aj, drag that thing out. Let's publish that sucker." It's an issue that I have in pencil Xerox — about 150 pages of my work is sitting around in various inventory jobs: AVENGERS; two issues of SUBMARINER; a couple of CAPTAIN AMERICAs; a couple of Westerns. I've had the experience recently with "Palm Sunday," the Gypsy story in AMAZING HIGH ADVENTURES #2. That's a job that I pencilled when I was in California that I'd just held onto for all of those years. **Carl Potts** had seen it way back then, and he decided to use it finally. What a strange experience it was to ink a job that you'd pencilled all those years ago. I pencilled the hell out of that sucker so I had to ink it the same way — it took awhile. Same for the Quicksilver job in MARVEL FANFARE; it was drawn about four years before they actually used it.

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DWIGHT: *Mentioning changes in style, applying that to Jim Starlin, how do you assess the change in his art since the* WARLOCK *days?*

ALAN: Well, he did a lot of study from life. He went into painting — that changed his style for quite awhile. With the "Metamorphosis Odyssey" he was into a photographic style. Now, if anything, he's gone back to the old WARLOCK kind of style — taking what he learned and going back to the tried-and-true style and simplicity and straight-on storytelling. When **Starlin** tells you a story he puts the character right on your nose. There's no question of what he wants you to see. Jim is also one of the least starstruck people, for as successful as he is in this business. He and **Berni Wrightson** live upstate, they run around in the woods and have a good old time, and they just don't let the

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A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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"I love drawing Sub-Mariner, especially."

star nonsense get to them like a lot of guys have.

DWIGHT: *If you were in an editorial position at a comic-book company . . .*

ALAN: "OOO!! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *What would you tell your creative team?*

ALAN: Oh. The *creative* team. Probably just a distillation of everything I've said so far. You want to do a strip, put as much of your self and your spirit and what you love about comics into it. I have a saying tacked to my drawing board: ZEN COMIC STRIPPING. That's a reminder to have a good time. Sometimes when you get under deadline pressures, you can forget that you're supposed to be enjoying this. If you're not, then you're a slave and an idiot. I mean, just the fact that we got to choose a creative outlet to make our daily bread — what a wonderful choice that is! That's also why I'm taking a chance with a couple of things that I created. I could be drawing one of the established Marvel characters and that wouldn't be a comedown because I love 'em, Sub-Mariner especially. But as **Denny O'Neil** said one time, "Most of the time we're mediocre, but when we're great we are something apart." **Frank Miller** said it in his ROLLING STONE interview: When the comics are really on, when they're cookin', they're not movies, they're not television, they're not animation, they're something special and apart that the reader can bring his own experiences to and have an experience that's unlike any of the other artforms. Also, as **Neal Adams** likes to say, and I like to dredge this one up: comics, like jazz, is one of the true American artforms, developed right here.

DWIGHT: *Okay. Say I walk into a comic-book store and I don't know comics . . .*

ALAN: Oh, I like poepie like that, 'cause I'll throw 'em all kinds of stuff. I'll throw 'em a JUDGE DREDD or **Garcia-Lopez**'s DEADMAN or . .

DWIGHT: *But you're not always there to help them.*

ALAN: Well, then it's no fair. I refuse this question. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *The point I'm trying to make is that there are some really exemplary specimens of the medium out there, but how do you find them when you've got this rack of 200 different titles?*

ALAN: That's just appetite. If you're eight years old you're gonna know what you're gonna like, just like we bought comics when we were kids. Then you grow up a little bit and you start looking at the advertisements or you start to buy MARVEL AGE or COMICS INTERVIEW or AMAZING HEROES to see what looks neat that you're gonna buy. With STEELGRIP I just said let me make some impressive visuals. What would **Kirby** do?

DWIGHT: *What would Al Weiss do?*

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A COMICS INTERVIEW Publication. COMING THIS SUMMER!

COMING IN PART TWO: Al asks the question, "Would Stan Lee be caught red-handed at a Kiss concert?" You bet — and we have the photo to prove it!

"It's interesting. I am part of the progres-

PAUL POWER

Paul S. Power is many things — a cartoonist, a boxer, a comic-book historian, an instantly likable glad-hander with a fantastic personality and sense of humor. Originally from Britain by way of Australia, Paul has only recently immigrated to the Colonies where he blossomed from being a cartoonist to a career in the movie industry which has marked him not only as a Renaissance man, but also as a storyboard artist, actor, animator, director, and screen playwriter. Yet for all his other successes Paul has a gut level need to create comic books, too. (Perhaps you saw his "Rock Warrior" in Pacific's SKATEMAN #1.)

This interview took place deep in the heart of Hollywood. Paul was working at Paramount Studios on the movie PRETTY IN PINK, and that is where the interview took place in mid-1985. My friend and associate Marf Roberts and I were awed by being allowed to wander freely in this dream factory. With every step we fully expected to bump into the ghost of W. C. Fields. Paul and I became fast friends that day. You may not agree with everything he has to say, but nobody can deny the strength of Paul's conviction or the articulateness of this singular dynamic voice...

KEN JONES: *How prevalent was comic-book art and cartooning in Australia when you were young?*

PAUL POWER: Oh, it was a big thing. Yeah, god, it was everywhere — let's talk about the adventure strips. They were always very big in Australia. The Australian comic book industry was big in the '40s. It faded out by 1956. But I was fortunate enough to work with a lot of those fellows — we can get into that later. Comics played a very important part and they were widely read. I think you'll find that in COMICS INTERVIEW #9, someone talked to an Australian guy back East and THE PHANTOM, as he said, came out every two weeks. Comic books were really big and the adventure strips were well run in Australia.

KEN: *Did you see a lot of American cartoon work?*

PAUL: Yeah. Actually I remember in England, before we came to Australia, looking at a lot of reprint comic albums. My brothers would get BATMAN, SUPERMAN, and PLASTIC MAN by **Jack Cole**. They used to reprint British albums of Quality Comics. PLASTIC MAN really blew me out at the age of four. Man, it was just incredible! Yeah, comics have always been there in my family, and they were encouraged. They kept all of us kids quiet and they were great babysitters.

KEN: *What is the native scene like in Australia? Are there any hot cartoonists you can tell us about?*

PAUL: Oh god, there's a kid in Australia named **Phil Barlow** who did INKSPOTS and is now doing storyboards for film. I am kind of out of touch with it now. **Frants Kantor** is an illustrator who really wants to do comics. He's pretty phenomenal. **John Dixon**, who did AIRHAWK, the one I worked with for seven years — he was my real schooling. **Dixon** was a great help. **Monty Wedd**. **Paul Wheelahan** did a thing called THE PANTHER. He's now a script writer in Australia — doing extremely well. What I've found is that a lot of the Australian comic-book artists became illustrators or went into animation, or acting and script writing, when the comic-book scene died, like **Fred Cullen**. He was a BIG BEN BOLT and DRAGNET fan — he wrote THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER, an Australian feature

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Paul S. Power
Born: Warthamson, London, England
Residence: Los Angeles, California, and Sydney, Australia

Occupation: Motion picture illustrator, film director
Training: Alexander Mackie's School of Art, and John Dixon and Alex Toth

Credits: Film: worked with Peter Weir, George Miller, John Milliuś, Steven Spielberg; assistant to Toth on SUPERFRIENDS. Comic strips-PROFESSER OM (in Australia), AIRHAWK, ROCK WARRIOR,Ghost on THE FLYING DOCTORS for John Dixon.
Hobbies: Adventure comic strip collecting of the '50s and '60s, boxing, painting, movies, horse back riding
Favorite Bands: Beatles, Badfinger, Eno, 10 C. C.
Favorite Cartoonist: Alex Toth, John Dixon, Russ Heath, John Cullen Murphy, Hart Amos, Stanley Pitt, Alex Kotsky, Leonard Starr, Hal English, Al Williamson, Alex Raymond
Goals Yet to Be Achieved: To direct a Western, and publish EAST MEETS WEST

sion that went from comics into film."

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Photo: Floyd Norman

Motion picture illustrator Paul S. Power with Four Armed Berserker he designed for MY SCIENCE PROJECT

"AVENGERS #2 really blew me out!"

film. Many became script writers, painted on the side, or would do their own presentation art as well. So it progressed from the comic strips that were influenced by **Raymond** and **Caniff** — you know, FLASH GORDON and TERRY AND THE PIRATES. It went from there into doing comic books, comic strips and then into film, animation and live action. It's quite interesting. I am part of the progression that went from comics into film.

KEN: *That's a fascinating trend.*

PAUL: Yeah, it happened to me. If the Australian comic book industry hadn't died, I'd still be doing comics.

KEN: *Why do you think the Australian industry died?*

PAUL: Well, it died because of distribution problems with Gordon & Gotch, the biggest distributor, plus television in 1956, a new medium for Australia. It was cheaper to buy DC material at reprint prices in the '60s. They were cheaper to buy, just like syndicated comic strips are. It's always cheaper to buy it that way and easier to print. Then they started bringing in the color comics, too. I really discovered Marvel Comics in 1964 when AVENGERS #2 came out. I remember buying that with my twin brother and my mum sending him back to buy DIVER DAN or something like that. I still have that AVENGERS — it really blew me out.

KEN: *You were influenced by Marvel at a young age then?*

PAUL: Oh yeah! Well, let's say **Jack Kirby** — I really liked the **Lee** and **Kirby** stuff. That's why I like **John Byrne's** stuff, which I feel captures that flavor.

KEN: *What were your very earliest influences as a cartoonist?*

PAUL: **John Dixon**'s AIRHAWK. Even earlier than that a comic book that came out in England called TV COMIC. It was basically a weekly comic book that adapted British television, especially kid's shows. ROY ROGERS by **Mike Arnes** was printed, too.

Mike Royer inked Paul's pencils for this Marvel sample. According to Paul, he turned Marvel down when they couldn't meet his terms.

KEN: *They still do that over there a lot don't they?*

PAUL: Yeah, it's still going on. There was a thing called HANK THE COWBOY by **Francis Coudrill**, who is now a fine arts painter. He was a puppeteer, too. That show really was something. I use to draw HANK THE COWBOY all the time, which is why I love Westerns. It's a natural progression.

KEN: *Did you see a lot of American Westerns when you were young?*

PAUL: Oh yeah. I'll tell you, now that I am doing storyboards, I am dying to do a Western. If I was on another movie and a Western came up — I'd just die for it. Westerns are going to come back. There are a few Westerns in the planning stages.

KEN: *How do you think Westerns will come back? What form will they take?*

PAUL: I don't know. I just saw a film last night — RUSTLER'S RHAPSODY — and it's a nice parody. I saw it here, on the lot. It pays homage to the "B" Western. It's a good little film and I really liked it. I can imagine a wide spectrum... I think the Western can cover all ages, even more so than the Detective category did in the past. I think it will come back, even though here at the Paramount movie lot they got rid of the Bonanza town. But I am digressing. I've talked to a lot of people and they all want to do Westerns. Like **Lawrence Kasdan**'s SILVERADO. I've heard a lot of good things about that from friends of mine who worked on it.

KEN: *Tell us about storyboarding?*

PAUL: When I am storyboarding for a director, I try to become the director's 20/20 vision. Some cartoonists may think that the transition from doing comic books — as in, let's say, DC and Marvel type comics — to animation, is easy. But to go from comic books into live action you have to really know the functions of a camera. You have to really know film. You should go to film school and study it. We're talking about

Paul ghosted this episode of John Dixon's AIR HAWK, a popular Australian syndicated strip.

AIR
HAWK
AND THE
FLYING DOCTOR
A TRAP IS ABOUT TO BE SPRUNG—
IT'S THEM, ALL RIGHT— NOW GET OUT OF SIGHT!
AND REMEMBER— I WANT THEM ALIVE FOR QUESTIONING—!

"I wanted to be JACK KIRBY!"

continuity. We're talking about flow of action. If you're acting with a pencil, you've got to be the director's 20/20 vision and know camera lenses — what you can and cannot do on a stage — how to match what you have on location when you're on a sound stage. In a sense you're pre-directing and that's what I am headed for — directing. I've done some second unit directing and some first unit directing with **Michelle Manning** on BLUE CITY.

I've been a storyboard illustrator for 15 years. That was accidental, because what I wanted to do was to draw comics. I wanted to be **Jack Kirby**. I thought **Kirby** was it. Although I did like other styles — I like RIP KIRBY, too. I remember in 1967 when FLASH GORDON came out by **Al Williamson**. It knocked me out! I discovered **Stanley Pitt**, as well. So my taste in comics, as in music and film, is quite eclectic. I like funny animal stuff, also. But I really, really dig adventure strips. I think if you get an adventure strip artist like **Alex Kotsky** who does APARTMENT 3-G or **Leonard Starr** from ON STAGE or **Don Drake** from JULIET JONES or **John Cullen Murphy** from BIG BEN BOLT, they're more capable of being able to make the transition into films because of the time lapse involved in comic strips.

You see, in a comic book, page time goes by really quick and in a daily comic strip you're dealing with those time lapses. So it's like moving a camera around, you can bridge the storyboards. For instance in a comic you might have three panels and you might have three frames or four frames — but put in a transition scene or dissolve and it'll work as a film. I've found that in the adventure comic strips, in general, everything is placed in the right place and the characters walk around in it. It's very cinematic. That's what I learned when I worked with **John Dixon** — he's one of the best. There's very cinematic mood in comic strips — it's not the bravado of **Jack Kirby** — although there are places where you can put in the **Jack Kirby** bravado and it works, like in ROAD WARRIOR, but not all the time.

KEN: *Then basically the difference in comic strips and comic books is a matter of timing?*

PAUL: Yeah, timing and something else. Any cartoonist that wants to make that transition — my advice is, "Hey fellows, you better study film because you're in for a rude surprise." Also, I think it's extremely hard to do — even though I'm in the union, it took me four years and a couple of directors who really wanted me.

KEN: *Let's talk a little bit more about your film and animation credits.*

PAUL: All right. In 1970, I worked for **Eric Porter**. I went from Columbia Pictures doing freelance for **Jack Walter Thompson**. I was doing storyboards for commercials and I wanted to be an animator. I joined **Eric Porter**, who at that time was an independent, and then later got a contract with Hanna-Barbera. They said to me, "You're going to work on SUPERFRIENDS." This was in 1973. In 1970, I worked on MARCO POLO AND THE RED DRAGON. It airs here on Showtime every now and then. I cut my teeth on that. A lot of Australian cartoonists worked on that. That was a blast. They were **Hal English**, **Monty Wedd**, **Anthony Chan** and a few others I forget right now — but it was really something. I mean, when you're sixteen years old — Wow! It was nice training.

KEN: *Why don't you tell us a little more about Alex Toth. What kind of learning experience was it working with him?*

PAUL: Alex was producer for Hanna-Barbera in Sydney, Australia, of SUPERFRIENDS. When I met Alex at a North Sydney pub, I brought in a big sack of comic books for him to sign. He seemed to feel out of place. I don't think he'll disagree with that. We hooked up and I showed him a bunch of my artwork, like EAST MEETS WEST and ROCK WARRIOR. He quite liked it. He said, "You got some interesting things here." He took me under his wing. He was really like my mentor — he and **Dixon**. They turned me onto different things. They said, "Hey, have you seen this artwork? Have you thought about how this hand works? Have you looked at this film or read this author?" Alex was great. For eight years we wrote letters and he constantly gave me advice and, by the way, I took *all* of it. I owe a lot to Alex for my success in films. Some of it was what I got from **Dixon**, but mainly it has to do with Alex. He's a hard taskmaster. Look! Some cartoonists say he's a very difficult man. I don't believe that at all. He believes in what he's doing. For him, to do a comic book is not just to do it for the money. Alex really believes in the medium and he wants to really transcend comics as they are today. It's like the films we were talking about — Westerns, for example. They could be "A" Westerns or "B" Westerns. They could deal in different genres of story like mystery, action, adventure or drama. It's all there and comics could do the same thing. They have in the past.

As much as I like **Jack Kirby**, I don't think that Marvel — from what I've heard and what I've read — instructed too many people to draw in **Kirby**'s style. I think artists should look to other areas of entertainment and should read classical literature. Comic writers, as well, should look to other areas. There are lots of other things going on besides what's happening in the comic-book industry. The only one who pushes it along at all is **John Byrne**, in my opinion, while still remaining traditional.

KEN: *Byrne had some great training at Charlton drawing funny animals and all kinds of unusual stuff. Will we ever see the ELMO AND THE APE WOMEN FROM MARS animated movie?*

PAUL: Maybe. I am negotiating for it right now with the producer of the movie, PRETTY IN PINK, Ms. **Lauren Schuller**. It's quite interesting and funny. I created Elmo mainly because I like the title — ELMO AND THE APE WOM-

Paul Power in disagreement with a potential comics publisher.

© 1985 Touchstone Films Photo: Floyd Norman

"I think Marvel instructed too many

EN FROM MARS. *(Laughter.)* I am still pushing for those concepts in live-action — I've got an agent on it. There's an option on the ROCK WARRIOR that I am quite happy about.

KEN: *What are some of the most recent films you've worked on?*

PAUL: Well, besides doing storyboards and other related concept art, I've been second unit director on BLUE CITY, an action film by **Michelle Manning**, produced and written in part by **Walter Hill** of 48 HOURS. Other films for Paramount Studios were **Tony Scott's** TOP GUN, **John Hughes'** PRETTY IN PINK. For Columbia — ST. ELMOS FIRE, GOONIES for **Spielberg** and **Richard Donner**, **Disney's** MY SCIENCE PROJECT for **Jon Beatuel**. All were different, all were hard work but fun. One must enjoy themselves at the drawing board!

KEN: *Tell us more about GOONIES.*

PAUL: GOONIES was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed working for **Dick Donner**. If you've never met the man, he sounds like God. He's got this big booming voice and he's like your favorite uncle. He's a relatively young guy. He's a big man. I followed his work on both television and on screen from his first feature film X-15, clear to the work he did on the BANANA SPLITS where he directed **Jan-Michael Vincent** on that adventure show. yeah, working for **Donner** was the most fun I've had in a long time. He's a nice guy, he has a gym next to his office! I like to work out so I'd go in and work out with him and we'd talk about doing storyboards. I storyboarded GOONIES and so did **Sherman Labby** and we had two other illustrators as well; **Tom Southwell**, who is working on the TWILIGHT ZONE television series — he was doing graphic design, and **Jack Johnson**, who worked on RAIDERS, was doing large production illustration. **Sherman Labby** who did BLADE RUNNER, and I, did the continuity and we just had a blast. I drew **John Matuszak** as one of the key actors and they cast him as Sloth. I was very happy about that. I mean where else can we find a bloke that weighs 275-pounds and is 6-foot 8-inches tall and has wall-to-wall muscles? He was a shoo-in for it.

I like John. I met him at a party. he was really, really nice and a thorough gentleman. Actually, how I really got onto GOONIES was, I played a bit part in RED DAWN. I got a little bit drunk with **John Millius** when we were on location, smoking cigars and drinking brandy. He would tell me all his favorite **John Wayne** stories. **Millius** has some of the greatest stories. Man, you could listen to him for hours but you've got to

HOW TO BREAK INTO HOLLYWOOD DEPT: "I got drunk and played a bit part in RED DAWN."

work, so you'd have to shoo him off from time to time.

One day, we talked about the Russians coming in and taking over McDonald's after jumping off a tank. You imagine McDonald's as this rare capitalistic delicacy, such fine food! The drunker we got the funnier it sounded, so I quickly rushed downstairs and got some paper and drew it up. **Millius** said, "Yeah, we love it." The next day I got called on the set and I thought I was in trouble because **William Smith** is Russian. I've found that a lot of people who were playing Russians were really and truly Russian, or they were fluent in Russian. I'd done some graphic design on the film as well as the propaganda posters. I was redoing the lettering translations. I got the set designer, **Jim Tocel** to do the translating for me. We wrote it out and we put in things like "sperm burger" and stupid adolescent things like that — and I thought I was called on the set to be told, "Hey, jerk, you can't do things like that." I thought I was in trouble. Well, I got on the set and **Fred Rexor**, who's another guy who's almost seven feet — he's dressed up as this Russian K.G.B. man. He picks me up by the

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people to draw in Jack Kirby's style."

© 1986 Warner Bros. Pictures

"Spielberg saw it, and the next thing I knew I was storyboarding GOONIES."

back of my neck and my arse and I thought, "What the hell is going on?" and **Pat Swayze** picked me up as well. At that stage I weighed 118-pounds and **Millius** picked me up and then it dawned on me that this was the storyboard that I drew. I am hurting now. **Millius** said, "This is great. We're going to do the scene." So they gave me a short haircut — I was in wardrobe and we did it. It was really funny. **William Smith** pulls up in a '09 blue Corvette with Russian flags on each side of it and this big tank turns up with its gun barrel turned toward the serving-counter window. Can you imagine ordering a Big Mac and turning to the side and there's a barrel pointing right at you! All these Russian soldiers come in and order Big Macs and when the main actors come back into town, they're very scared of being discovered. Anyway, while this is going on, I pull rank. I am five feet one and all these people are, like, six feet tall! Fred Rexór is taller still. All the extras had to be at least six feet tall. I am a Russian officer. I come in and pull rank on them. I order a Big Mac, and what I don't know is that the K.G.B. man comes in and starts throwing people out of McDonald's. I timed it so that I unwrap the hamburger, and just as I got it to my mouth and I bite into it — I get grabbed in close-up profile. He picks me up, swings me in the air — they thought I was on wires — and throws me right into the camera. Man! I freaked! I had this Big Mac sticking out of my face, ketchup all over the place and I thought for sure I was going to hit that camera and that's it! I showed real terror! **Spielberg** saw it and said, "Who was that?" and they said, "That's **Paul Power**, our illustrator." He'd met me once before and he'd remembered me. So that's how I got on GOONIES. Also **Ed Verreaux** is a friend of mine — he did RAIDERS. Ed suggested me as, too, just a reminder. The next thing I know I was on GOONIES.

KEN: *Have you ever talked comic books with Spielberg — I understand he's quite interested in them?*

PAUL: No. He's really busy now. I hope to, on the next project. It's a project I can't talk about right now, but I will say — man, it's hot! **Dick Donner** wasn't used to doing storyboards. He did have boards on SUPERMAN, but not as extensive, but **Spielberg** likes everything storyboarded. You're not hooked into it, but with a storyboard you have something to lock in on. If things go wrong and you've bought that location for a certain amount of time — if you go over budget or if things go wrong, you go back to the storyboards and shoot from them. You see, a picture's a thousand words — or more dollars.

KEN: *Spielberg even draws a lot of his own sort of crude storyboards, too.*

PAUL: Yes, he knows exactly what he wants to see. I encourage directors to at least do scribbles, so that they can think visually. When I was working on MY SCIENCE PROJECT I got **Jonathan Betual** to do that. It's one thing to write a film — another to go and direct it. You really have to think about it, visually — what's going to be there — which is very different from the written word.

KEN: *I just read the synopsis of MY SCIENCE PROJECT in the latest DISNEY NEWS. It sounds like, if you didn't have a tight rein on that project, especially with all the dimensions opening up, all that could get confusing.*

PAUL: That's true! I was very happy with it. There's a lot of **Jack Kirby** things in there. I put them in there.

KEN: *Exploding galaxies and all the Kirby trademarks?*

PAUL: Well, they followed the storyboards really tightly. I was ecstatic when I saw a partial rough-cut of it. Down to what I put on coffee tables and how I arranged radios and television sets

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the mirth.
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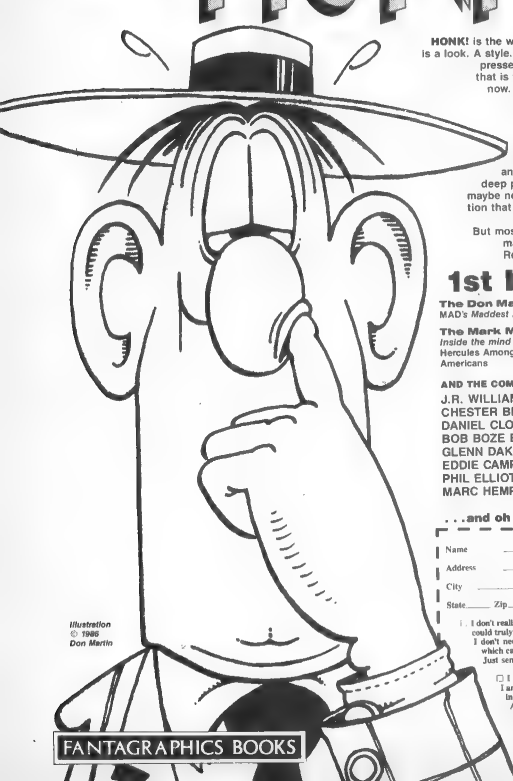

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"If not for Kirby, where would Shooter be?"

© 1985 MGM Studios

— all of that **David Snyder**, Production Designer, and the boys just followed that. It was really something. I did 90% of that film. **Royer** and **Steve Rude** came in and saw some of the work. When the San Diego Con was happening last year, **Ken Steacy** and **Steve Leialoha** came by and saw it too. When I was doing the dinosaur sequence in there I strongly referred to — swiped, actually — those DC war books — were they WEIRD WAR?

KEN: *Either that or STAR-SPANGLED WAR STORIES. They both featured those great G.I.s-versus-dinosaurs stories.*

PAUL: "My Buddy the Dinosaur," right? I just put in those frames — I didn't copy or anything. I changed them.

KEN: *Just an inspiration, right?*

PAUL: Yeah! It was a blast! They've got a Tyrannosaurus Rex that bursts from another dimension onto a basketball court. Guys are hitting him with bazookas. Teenagers are saying, "What the hell?" and "Arrgh!" I hope **Kirby** sees it!

KEN: *Is there a lot of stop-action animation in the dinosaur sequence?*

PAUL: A guy who worked with **Phil Tippet** on the rancor monster in JEDI — he did it — because **Tippet** was working on his own dinosaur project. Yeah, I did the first boards on that and **Tom Cranham** did some more, while I went onto something else. We designed monsters. I got to create some things with **Jonathan Betual**. I'd like to do another movie with him. We're talking about it now.

KEN: *Sounds like a fabulous project.*

PAUL: It has the **Jack Kirby** elements down.

KEN: *I'm sure you've met Jack, right?*

PAUL: Yeah, he's amazing! I met him at Hanña-Barbera when I was working there He told me about the Aussies that he met during the war. He's a really nice man. You know, Ken, after all the characters that **Kirby** created for Marvel, in a time when Marvel was going to slow down or even close up shop in the early '60s — he created a publishing house that since then has expanded into live-action films, toy licensing, an animation studio; there are many new options on **Kirby's** creations for films by Marvel. **Siegel** and **Shuster** who have created SUPERMAN, but **Kirby** created, almost totally alone the Marvel Universe. I feel that Marvel owes **Kirby** a piece of the Marvel corporate "pie" — at the very least, a most deserved pension. Granted, he didn't know that these Marvel super-heroes would be this huge, nonetheless, if Jack had't been at Marvel consistently creating super heroes, where would **Stan Lee** and **Jim Shooter** be? The whole Marvel television and movie options set-up just wouldn't exist. Maybe **Shooter** would still be at DC, and, **Stan Lee** might have gone into advertising or writing for TRUE or mens magazines. You ever thought about that? I'd like to know what the readers think about this? I'm not slamming **Shooter** or **Stan Lee** — I'm just pointing out an interesting plot-line for an issue of WHAT IF?

This acidic image by Paul created a haunting poster for MGM's RED DAWN.

This proves another point — if you're going to go out and create your own characters, you should go out and cover yourself straightaway — which is what I did. That's why I don't want to talk too much about my own characters, because if you let your concepts or ideas out, it's out there and someone can try to rip you off — unless you've got the money and can go out and sue them — and I am prepared financially and from a legal standpoint, to sue people. But rather than getting one's self into that situation on their creative rights, be really careful who you show your concepts to. There's a lot of shrewd people out there!

KEN: *I know from sad experience.*

PAUL: Just take your time and cover yourself. If you think you've got a good idea, take your time and who knows, you might really have something that will buy you that house or get you that car. You never know — but just don't give it away.

KEN: *I heard you're really a movie fan. Tell us about your favorite movies.*

PAUL: There're so many! I love the James Bond movies. I love **Orson Welles'** work. **Sergio Leone's** spaghetti-Westerns, **Robert Wise**, **Mark Rydell**, *film noire*, Westerns, Sci-Fi, real, and

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ECLIPSE COMICS

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"Spielberg admits he uses storyboards."

unreal, whew! **Bill Forsyth**, **Terrence Young**, **Alan Parker's** THE WALL and BIRDY, lots of films.

Oh, by the way, did you know that most of those **Welles** films were storyboarded?

KEN: *Of course they were!*

PAUL: Welles claimed it wasn't true, but I have storyboards that say otherwise. Not to diminish the importance of a director because, while you may draw the storyboard and envision it all for him, he has to go on location or on-stage and motivate his actors to do their jobs. The director has to imbue the film with his personality. That's why **Spielberg** isn't afraid to admit that he uses storyboards, because he still has to direct. You can draw the hell out of a film — you can do the best angles, greatest camera moves, put down the finest lenses, do complicated crane shots, and dolly shots — all of that. You can make the best-looking film in the world on paper, but if the actors and actresses don't have a good script and the director isn't right on top of it, you don't have a movie. But storyboards do save money. They're even cost effective. More film-makers are using boards. It makes sense. You can actually budget your film right down to the last penny with storyboards. I say to all those film-makers who say, "Oh, I don't need this." think again! Because it is cost effective and there are more cartoonists out there who want to do movies, so give them a break. eh? *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *Let's backtrack and talk about the influences of film on comic books. Certainly CITIZEN KANE was an influence on Eisner and Kirby . . .*

PAUL: That's interesting, because you hear **Eisner** talk about films like MAN RAY. These cats talk about the relationship of comic books to films. I am more inclined to think that comic strips are closer to film than comic books, or let's say the comic of the '40s, '50s, and '60s. **Alex Kotsky** came out of **Eisner's** studio and he's very conscious of film. His APARTMENT 3-G back in the '60s was just marvelous. I am working on a project that will involve **Kotsky** — but I can't really talk about it. There's a lot of things about comics that are really cinematic. Guys like **Maurice Zuberanos** — he drew storyboards for CITIZEN KANE for **Welles**. **Milt Caniff** said, "I did this shot first," low camera angles, well, maybe he did. Maybe Zubie saw it in TERRY AND THE PIRATES and drew it from there. A lot of those films that you like, well, directors like **John Ford** and **John Huston**, used illustrators, too. Any directors who are worth their salt use storyboards to get maximum effect. You can see that in a lot of movies in the '50s and '60s. They didn't storyboard. Those movies don't look so hot. It's nice because you can work out all the problems with storyboards instead of wasting time and money on location.

KEN: *If you were forced into picking one favorite movie what would it be?*

PAUL: THE THIRD MAN, **Carol Reed** and **Orson Welles**. **Hitchcock** movies were illustrated by **Tom Wright**; he is now a director. I interviewed **Harold Michaelson**, who was a big fan of **Harold Foster** and **Alex Raymond**, he did storyboards on PSYCHO and REAR WINDOW and VERTIGO. Besides **Alfred Hitchcock**, my favorite directors are **Peter Weir**, **George Miller**, **Mark Rydell**, **Sydney Pollack**, **Spielberg**, **Richard Donner**, **Terry Gilliam**. Of course, **Orson Welles** and **Akira Kurosawa** have got to be there, too!

KEN: *I've always seen the comic strip thing in Hitch's work.*

PAUL: It comes down to continuity — in telling a story and having a good script. I like to have a good script because I've worked on good films. To tell

This vignette, based on Cheech and Chong's upcoming movie, displays Paul's unusual sense of humor.

CHEECH & CHONG
CHEECH & CHONG — NOW!
YOU KNOW WHAT MAN? NOW THAT WE'VE GOT OUR OWN COMIC STRIP MAYBE WE SHOULD TRY FOR A NEW IMAGE!
OH SURE MAN! JUST THE THING! GROW RIGHT THERE!
EH, CHEECH IS THAT YOU?
YEAH! TRY THIS ON FOR SIZE, YOU'LL LOVE IT!
AARRRGGG
OHAH! HOW ABOUT THIS?
NAH! TOO HOLLYWOOD!
OH WOW! HOW'S THIS? FAROUT!
NAH! TOO FAR!
HO! HO! GET A LOAD OF THIS MAN!
NAH! TOO CHIC!
HEY, WHAT'S YA THINK?
NAH, TOO OFFENSIVE TO CHICANOS!
GEE, I DON'T KNOW MAN. WE'VE BEEN THROUGH'T LOT OF CLOTHES AND WELL...
THAT'S IT! THAT'S IT!
WOW? OH YEAH! I'VE BEEN LIVING IN THIS HOUSE AWL MY LIFE AND I DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS A GENIUS?!
I JUST ABOUT FLIP, CHEECH!

SUBSTANCE

MAX COLLINS and TERRY BEATTY'S

Ms. TREE

THE ORIGINAL

MONTHLY FROM RENEGADE

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"I got to meet JOHN LENNON!"

you the truth, I've been spoiled and it's like this — if I don't do a good job, I don't work. I am only on a film for as long as they need me, so if I am not doing my job, they'll replace me. I pride myself on doing good work.

KEN: *Let's talk about music. I've noticed the great influence of rock music in your work*

PAUL: I used to write for RAM magazine, an Australian rock magazine, and I was art director at EMI Records Sydney, Australia, in 1974. I was directing rock clips for them: **AC/DC**, **Little River Band**. Yeah, you know, the **Beatles** were a big influence on me. I got to met **John Lennon**, which was a real blast.

KEN: *Tell us about that.*

PAUL: Well, I made a phone call for a friend of mine, **Joey Molland**, who was in **Badfinger**. I found out from another guy that **Lennon** was coming to town in 1980. He was doing his come-back. He was jamming with people in Los Angeles like **Cheap Trick** and some punk bands. **Joey Molland** and **Tom Evans** played on the IMAGINE album and they were on the Apple label — so they all knew each other.

There's an interesting story about IMAGINE. They were playing accoustic guitars on "Jealous Guy" and doing back-up vocals. Some of the chords they were told to play, the group didn't feel were right. **George Harrison** was in on that session, too. They said to John that they didn't feel that the chords were right. So **Lennon** says, "What? These fucking **Badfinger** boys are trying to tell me how to run my song?!" They were a bit nervous because the group members were big fans of the **Beatles**. They were one of the first bands the **Beatles** signed to their Apple label. So Joey and Tom played the chords and **Lennon** said, "Fucking right, these **Badfinger** boys aren't bad, George." That's a nice story, eh? So they were having a bit of a jam session doing "Mack the Knife." I came to it. He made me a cup of tea. Nice fella. Too bad he's gone.

KEN: *A real tragedy. Do you play any musical instruments?*

PAUL: I sang in a band a long time ago. I did some back-up vocals on friends' albums — oohs and ahhhs. Been on a couple of **Joey Molland** back-up tracks.

KEN: *Would you care to comment on this? I am a guitar player myself and I used to do it professionally. You're the only cartoonist that puts everything on the guitar approximately where it belongs*

PAUL: Thank you. When I was doing some drawings of **Joey Molland**, he said, "Hey, these guitars aren't right, you're cheating." And he was right — so I fixed it. Also, when I was doing the comic strip "Eddie Riff" in RAM magazine, I had a rock audience and that's what they expected. "Riff" wasn't drawn real well. I was more interested in my boxing, at that stage, than I was my artwork.

Paul's pencils of his buddies from the rock group BADFINGER, inked by Dave (ROCKETEER) Stevens.

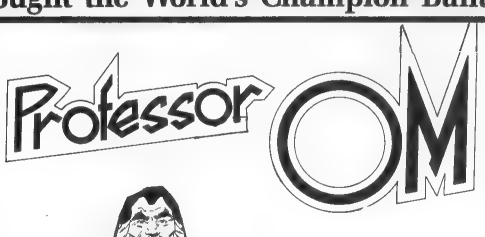
KEN: *The influence of boxing on your work seems great. Tell us about your pugilistic experiences.*

PAUL: My old man was a fighter. I've got five brothers and they're all fighters. When I was a little kid I kind of got pushed around a lot and was reluctant to fight. I was pretty scared. In reality, I still am, but if I am pushed I go berserk and that's a fact! Yeah, like I say, my old man was a fighter, my brothers-in-law, my brothers, too. I progressed from amateur into professional boxing. In 1977, I fought **Paul Ferrari**, who a couple of years later became Bantam Weight Champion of the World, and he put me in the hospital. That fight was one of the high moments of my life.

KEN: *I trust you protected your hands.*

PAUL: I wasn't really concerned about it. If you're a boxer you can't really be concerned about it. It's like **Kenny Norton**. I think he stopped himself from being a really supreme heavy weight fighter because he was so concerned about his looks. I did very well, but if anything

"I fought the World's Champion Bantam



had happened — that's the price you pay when you get in the ring. That's what I want to put into my adventure stuff. If you go out there and mess around — you're going to find out that violence is no fun and you don't always win. That's what I want to portray in some of my heroes. While they will still be heroes — they won't always win. There's always that risk. What people don't realize is that when you go playing around and raise your fists — you can die. We draw violence in comics as bravado, but the reality factor is, you could die. So it's not to be messed around with. As for the boxing, I had to get it out of my system. Once my family taught me how to fight — I turned into a bit of a tyrant. I got into a lot of trouble. I got messed up, too. Like I said, you don't always win.

So I put less into the boxing now and more in the artwork. They're my two real passions. I wanted to grow up and draw JOE PALOOKA. I also like **John Cullen Murphy** who draws BIG BEN BOLT and PRINCE VALIANT. I am looking forward to going to New York and interviewing **Murphy** for a book project I want to do on prize fighting and martial arts in comic books. It probably won't go anywhere but it's just one of those things I have to do. **Murphy** is fantastic, just a fine man and I am happy to say that he just won the National Cartoonist Award for the Best Adventure Strip. PRINCE VALIANT is increasing in sales and that's kind of rare for an adventure strip. That man does a good job — he does a damn good job.

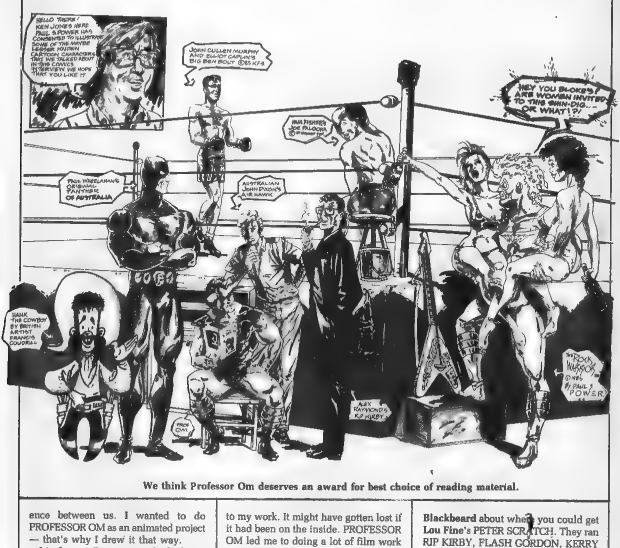
KEN: *He's stepping into a huge shadow.*

PAUL: Yeah, and he can really draw. He draws real people and that's what I want to do. I want to get the cartoon element out of my system. Just put it on the back burner for now, not forsake it. I want to go back to doing the realistic stuff.

KEN: *I wanted to ask you about PROFESSOR OM. Were you influenced by the underground comix movement in the '60s?*

PAUL: Oh yeah, but there was more of a British-Australian sense of humor in that and an eclectic taste in comics. I'd just come off of doing a Sunday AIRHAWK, having just taken over from **Hart Amos**. I was doing it so close to **Dixon** that they couldn't tell the differ-

Weight and he put me in the hospital."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JOHN CULLEN MURPHY / THE DAILY EXPLAINS / BIG BEN BOLT (DEC 1974)
RUPERT MURDOCH / SHE PUBLISHES / SPYMAG (SIC)
HEY YOU BLOKES / ARE WOMEN INVITED / TO THE GANG-BIG... / OR WHAT'S IT?
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AUSTRALIAN / JOHN DYSON'S / CARTOONS
"SHAW / THE COWBOY / BY BRITISH / ARTIST / FRANCIS / COVERT"
"DICK / WHACKY / BY / PAUL / POWER"
ALEX / RAYMOND / KIRBY
JOE / COOL

We think Professor Om deserves an award for best choice of reading material.

ence between us. I wanted to do PROFESSOR OM as an animated project — that's why I drew it that way.

It's funny. **Rupert Murdoch** discovered that strip. I went in to see the editor at the SUNDAY-MIRROR in September of 1977 — and put the strip down on a desktop and this other guy in a three-piece suit came in, picked up the comic strip and walked out with it. Well, I hadn't signed a deal or talked to anybody about money. The guy walks out with my strip. I said, "Hey, where are you going?" He turns around and says, "You did this? Oh, very nice. We will run it next Sunday." And I said, "You're not the editor." I didn't know what in the hell was going on. I was perplexed. He said, "Oh, my name is **Rupert Murdoch.** I like the strip — we'll run it on the front page of the comics." That was great because WIZARD OF ID was above me. People would read WIZARD OF ID and their eyes would naturally wander to my work. It might have gotten lost if it had been on the inside. PROFESSOR OM led me to doing a lot of film work in Australia.

KEN: *It's nice to have you say something good about Rupert Murdoch. He has such a negative persona in the United States.*

PAUL: Having worked with Rupert and seen what he's done for television in Australia, I think he'll do a good job with television over here. He said to me two things, "Stay away from Catholicism and abortion." I could do whatever the hell else I wanted. Kinda funny.

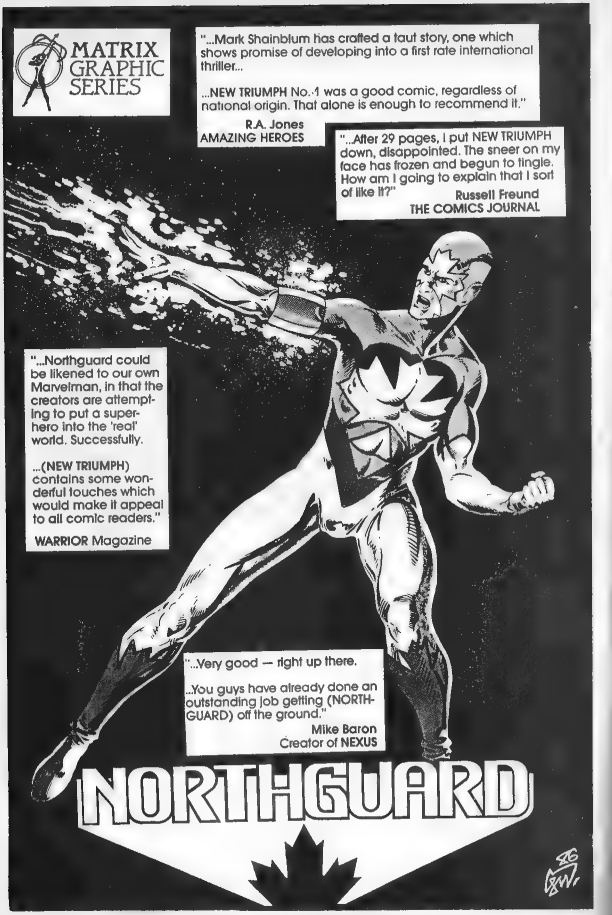
KEN: *So PROFESSOR OM was in the Sunday funnies?*

PAUL: Yeah. It was a blast. Lust and Rockets! *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *Australia must be a lot more interesting than America in terms of their newspaper strips.*

PAUL: Like I said, they run a lot of adventure strips. I was talking to **Bill Blackbeard** about what you could get **Lou Fine**'s PETER SCRATCH. They ran RIP KIRBY, FLASH GORDON, KERRY DRAKE, BIG BEN BOLT, JOE PALOOKA in Australia. It was great. I should have kept those strips. DICK TRACY was a big influence on me, too. I wrote a nice letter to **Chester Gould** suggesting he bring back B.O. Plenty. This was 1967. I got a nice card back and a drawing of B.O. Plenty. I found out in Australia we were three years behind in the strip. I didn't know that B.O. had already made his come-back. But I do wish that **Gould** had drawn more black people in his strip. He never drew blacks that I ever saw. That's why I'd like to see more of other racial types or groups in strips, and I don't mean as a *cliche*. I think that was one thing that **Stan Lee** did real well, that whole harmony of the races riff. If he did anything — that was probably his biggest contribution.

KEN: *And they weren't always just*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"You need Gary Groth to shake people up!"

larger-than-life characters like the Black Panther; there were blacks and hispanics standing around in the background, too.

PAUL: Yeah, and he had them actively playing a part. It didn't matter if they were a black guy or a white guy, Chinese, German, or whatever — which is how it should be. I like that ideology.

KEN: *You sent me a copy of STRIPS magazine. I've never seen it before. Can you tell us a little bit more about it?*

PAUL: STRIPS was put out by a guy named **Colin Wilson** who now draws I.T. BLUE BERRY in France. He was doing Judge Dredd in the JUDGE DREDD CHRONICLES. Colin and I keep up a great correspondence — he asks what art materials I use. I wanted to see him at Lucca but he wasn't there. That was wonderful. If you can go to the Lucca Comic Convention, in Italy, save your money and go! It's really something.

KEN: *Let's roll with that. Lucca is one thing I really want to talk about.*

PAUL: Well, what happened at last year's San Diego Convention was **Rick Marschall** said, "Do you want to go? and I said, "Yeah," and he said, he thought it would be a bit late to get me over there as a paid guest. You know, the airfare — but my hotel and meals would be paid for. I said, "That's fine. My accountant said I need a write-off anyway." And my wife, Beatrice, who manages me for my commercial work, thought it was a good idea. So we took off and went to Europe. We had a ball — went all over the place. Lucca was fantastic. We met **Bob Le Mer**, **Jerry Dumas** from BEETLE BAILEY and the BENCHLEY strip. Everybody we ran into was just terrific. Every foreign artist you could want to meet was there except for **Moebius**.

KEN: *He was out here in Hollywood working on a project then, wasn't he?*

PAUL: Yes. **Rick Marschall** hurt himself really bad — pulled a muscle in his ankle and should have been laid up for a week, but he said, "Forget it." So he was hobbling around for the rest of the convention. There's a dedicated man! We organized an art show and got a lot of artists from England, Germany and Belgium to show their work there. I had a lot of my artwork on display including my comic strips. I showed my animation. It was quite good for the ego. **Gary Groth** did quite well. I do like his magazine COMICS JOURNAL. You need a guy like Gary to shake people up. He's much needed. Too many cats believe that what they're doing is really great and some of it is — but a lot of it isn't. They should pull their finger out and do a good job. If comics want the recognition from other areas, from other art forms, then they must look at what they're doing honestly and say, "Hey, *is* what I am doing really any good?"

KEN: *Do you think it has something to do with the speed with which the work is done, with the closeness of the deadlines?*

PAUL: Yes and no. It has a lot to do with the market — with what sells. I am not hip to that but *it is* a business and it's a large investment. I thought Pacific Comics was pretty good. I was quite pleased when the **Schanes** brothers went with my strip "Rock Warrior" at all. I just wish I'd had time to do a better job of it. I am not real happy with how I inked it, but it was fun and I am sorry Pacific Comics is gone. Maybe Blackthrone Press will raise up and take over where Pacific left off.

I really try to push the independent comics on the screen. In MY SCIENCE PROJECT we got NEXUS on screen.

"There's more to the medium than just two

EAST MEETS WEST©tm PAGE # 23/24
BY AUSTRALIAN CARTOONIST PAUL S POWER.
FROM OUT OF NOWHERE BURSTING THROUGH THE SECRET BARRIER COMES... the ROCK WARRIOR!
I HOLD ON ONLY TO THE COMING OF COMING!
POOH MAGIC! THEY'VE FOUND THE HIDDEN DOOR TO THE SECRET TEE MAN CAVERN! COMING CONVENTION!
FORGET ABOUT THE CONVENTION! WHERE'S PROFESSOR OAK HEY?
LOOK! HERE COMES A SAUCER WITH US DEAD IN THEIR SIGHTS!
CRIKEY! I NEVER MEANT TO DRAW HIM LOOKING QUITE LIKE THIS! (SIGH) But, DID...
ONLY SECONDS AWAY FROM DISASTER PROFESSOR OAK AND CREW, BITTER PRAY FOR A MIRACLE...
COME ON FELLOWS LET'S GO... GO!
GO!
EDDIE 'THIS IS WHERE THE GROWTH HITS THE FAN!'
HERE'S TO ANOTHER GREEK CON! THIS IS DEDICATED TO THE LATE,GREAT AND NEVER, TO BE FORGOTTEN "LOU FINE", WHOSE SUPER-HERO WORK FOR "QUALITY" BACK IN THE 1940'S ON "THE RAY" AND "THE BLACK CONDOR", STILL CONTINUES TO INSPIRE TODAYS CARTOONISTS AND TO THE RENOWNED "ELLIOT CAPLIN"AUTHOR OF (WITH LOU FINE) "PETER SCRATCH" A DETECTIVE COMIC STRIP.

Rock Warrior to the rescue! From Paul's work-in-progress, EAST MEETS WEST.

They also put X-MEN in there. In RED DAWN, I created a scene where the kids were setting around reading independent comics, but they cut that. It's too bad the undergrounds faded. Maybe if the economy gets better, they will be able to take chances.

KEN: *You're saying that there should be more room for smaller projects — like underground comix — for more diversity?*

PAUL: If I am going to do something like EAST MEEST WEST as a comic — then I'm going to have to publish it myself or find somebody overseas to publish it, because nobody here is interested. I am really glad in one sense, because it's like a movie — not so much a comic book.

KEN: *Tell us about your Matt Hanson character and the Samurai thing you showed me. Is that from EAST MEEST WEST?*

PAUL: Yeah, that's **Charlie Bronson**. EAST MEETS WEST is, let's just say, different. I am playing with themes I enjoy and trying to do something different with it. Really, I've had some good reactions to it, but I've had some flat-out rejection. One was that I couldn't draw, from an assistant of **Dean Mullaney's** — that was pretty good fun for my ego. I am good enough for **Steven Spielberg** but not for Eclipse. *(Laughter.)* But that's okay — you either like it or you don't. I can't force people to like my stuff. I just hope that the big guys like Marvel and DC will take a chance on different things. You see, it has to come from those who create it. It can't come from the company. All the company can do is have managers like **Archie Goodwin**, or the poorman's EC, **Bruce Jones**, who cultivate what is brought to them. As a creative individual, deal through an agent. Protect yourself. I am not accusing the companies, all I am saying is use common sense, use business sense. I can't stress enough that comic books are a business and you're dealing with businessmen. Even if they love comics, you're dealing with businessmen, so make sure that you're covered, get your Library of Congress copyright, do your registration — just cover yourself. If you have a really good idea, think of all the other options before you go to comics.

KEN: *How exactly did "Rock Warrior" appear in Pacific's SKATEMAN #1?*

PAUL: The "Rock Warrior" appeared in

comic-book companies — go read it!"

© 1985 Warner Bros. Pictures

PROFESSOR OM in 1977. It appeared in an Australian fanzine in 1973. It was a passionate character that's a little different. Well, he's very different. I have what I feel is a fairly thorough knowledge of comics up to a point — from 1973 back to the '40s, my knowledge of trends in strips and comics is quite good. **David Scroggy** had "Rock Warrior" laying around Pacific and it filled a spot in SKATEMAN #1. I thought it worked out okay. I wanted to do something different with the superhero genre. I think I did. There's not a whole lot you can do in a few pages. I tried to do a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. I tried to introduce a mess of characters. I wish I'd had fifteen pages — then I could have really done something. But I was thankful. The "Rock Warrior" came about as a result of my dealings with the rock n' roll business and with how I see superheroes. It's very different.

KEN: *Why is that?*

PAUL: Well, I've had a lot of hard times. This will sound funny to a lot of people reading this — but when I came here I was the number one film illustrator/storyboard man in Australia — doing very well. I came here mainly to box. I stayed here. **Bil Stout** put me up for a while. I'd just broken up with a girl and it was a bit intense, so I had to get away. You've got to take a risk. If you believe in something intensely you've got to try. Just like I was talking about with fighters — you don't always win. It's the power of your conviction. You really must believe in what you're doing and I do. I studied. I am constantly studying. There are many artists out there who just draw the pants off of me, but I feel that I am constantly cultivating something slightly different. I am going back to art school, drawing and painting and improving my craft. You have to have that passion — the belief that sometimes you have to go against the tide. It served me very well in film because, like I said, if I don't do well, they replace me.

KEN: *It's too bad the comic-book industry doesn't do the same thing.*

PAUL: They do. **Frank Miller** calls his own shots. But there's a process you have to go through, a few cartoonists told me. It doesn't matter what I've done in other media. It doesn't matter how long I worked with **John Dixon** or **Alex Toth**. What matters is — what I do for them and whether it falls into their range of interests and needs — because I am playing their game. I am getting paid to do it their way and they're totally justified because it's theirs — not mine. I have a choice and so do the other writers and artists. They can either work for the comic companies or blow it out.

KEN: *But Paul — there ought to be some kind of a happy medium. I mean, you always have to play the game — but how much?*

PAUL: That's where an artist has to make a choice — how much do they want to work in comics? To me, it's not worth it, but that doesn't mean I am saying to people — give up! **Valentino** didn't — I admire him for that. I admire anybody who does if they have it in themselves and don't sit around on their butts. It's really basic. If you've got the time and study, hopefully you've got a creative mind and a heart that says, "Yeah, I believe it," but I don't think that you get there by just reading comics. You have to be well read. There's more to the medium than just comic books — or just two comic-book companies. There's real literature out there — go out and read it. I realize that there are financial considerations, but I really do wish people would take a chance and do something different because comic books could very easily fade out. It did before and it could happen again. So cultivate other areas. I don't want to see the superhero go away but I don't want to see mindless E.C. imitations, either, which bore me. You can print that. Now Ken, let's go get drunk.

"I was part of the group who designed MR.

Jules Engel in his Cal Arts office, in front of the storyboard from his first animated film, ICARUS, by Ray Bradbury. Nominated for an Academy Award, the film took Gold Medal at the Atlanta Film Festival.

Picture this: you go to interview an instructor of animation at a California school and he turns out to be the guy who created the most memorable sequence in Disney's FANTASIA — the dancing mushrooms, set to Tchaikovsky's NUTCRACKER SUITE. Then you learn he also helped create MR. MAGOO and ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS. Plus, he tells you that he never got any credit for his work on FANTASIA. On top of all that, you find that his paintings are displayed at the New York Museum of Modern Art, Chicago and Washington, D.C. galleries. That's exactly what happened the day I met Jules Engel, a short mild-mannered man, not unlike Magoo in some ways, but you get the feeling that his occasional absent mindness is only the sign of a piercing intellect soaring off into the clouds while his body remains rooted to his chair and his soft voice recaptures a half-century of animation history in that gentle European accent . . .

MARK BORAX: *What's your position here at Cal Arts?*

JULES ENGEL: I'm the head of the film graphics animation department — experimental animation, where the talent does as she or he pleases. We do not restrict the direction or style. The whole idea here is for the person to try out his wings. He could be a painter who never animated before, he could be somebody just out of high school, or he could be in the commercial world, interested in the mechanics of animation.

MARK: *Are most of your students interested in pursuing commercial animation?*

JULES: Every direction that there is — they go on to studio, commercial, or just to make their own films. A painter, generally, would like to make his or her own films, so he's interested in a medium where he can get involved with movement. The first thing I do at the beginning of the year, I ask each person "What are you going to do with this knowledge?" That gives me an idea how this place can best serve their talent, because I don't believe in classes, I don't believe in any of that stuff, like putting everybody in a room and we're all going to do heads, we're all going to do triangles — no. You sit down and you go your own way here, and I want to make pretty damn sure, that if you want to go into a commercial studio and start as an assistant animator, that by the time you get out of here you'll know all about storyboard and how to design characters.

MAGOO and ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS."

JULES ENGEL

MARK: *Where did you get your training?*

JULES: Disney, U.P.A. — MR. MAGOO, GERALD McBOING BOING — twelve years. I was part of the original U.P.A. group who designed Magoo, came up with the character. And I had my own studio for a while, we did ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS. You gotta make a living you know!

MARK: *(Laughter.)*

JULES: Of course, Disney, and many other studios. I also exhibit my paintings and sculpture internationally. With my kind of background I can be more helpful to young talent than if I just came out of an animation background. I have classical training, also I know what the world is like out there. The problem with a lot of these people who teach animation is that they learn something from somebody else, then when they teach it, a third or fourth year student will come up to them and ask "Now what? Where should I go?" And they don't know a damn thing about what's out there! I can pick up a phone, call the studio and tell them I have a talent here — "I want you to look at his or her work" and they will. If you're the kind of teacher who can't pick up the phone, I don't think you're really helping the talent.

MARK: *When did you switch from being a professional artist to being a professional instructor?*

JULES: I never did — I'm still making animated films. In fact I just picked something up from Hollywood Film Enterprises this morning. I just finished three or four films, so I've always done both.

MARK: *What kind of films are you producing these days?*

JULES: My terrain has always been abstraction. In my own work, painting and sculpture, it's always been hard-edged abstraction *(Points to shelf)* Those two over there are mine. I never made any switch from working to teaching. Everything always had a natural continuity.

MARK: *What's it like working with Hollywood animation studios today, compared to the old days?*

JULES: Lack of budget is the big thing. In other words, they say it costs so much money, so we send things over to Korea

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jules Engel
Occupation: Head of Animation/Experimental Film Graphics at California Institute of the Arts
Born: Budapest, Hungary — A long time ago!
Residence: Los Angeles, California
Background: Co-creator of FANTASIA, BAMBI, MR. MAGOO, ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS, and GERALD McBOING BOING
Training: Disney Studios
Solo Film Credits: COARAZE (Winner of the Jean Vigo Award; 1st Prize Uberhausen), IVORY KNIFE (1st Prize Venice Film Fest), TORCH AND TORSO (1st Prize, Edinburgh Film Fest), plus many other animated and live action films
Favorite Painting: COMPOSITION WITH YELLOW (1935) by Mondrian

All art accompanying this article is © 1986 Walt Disney Productions unless otherwise noted

SWIFTSURE. REDFOX.
AND MORE TO COME.

WATCH THIS SPACE...

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"The studios call my students for help."

or Japan to have the animation done. In the time we created Magoo, and even going back to Disney, there was no such problem. Today, animators and assistant animators, inkers, painters, get paid a great deal more, so the cost would be greater to the studio. The problem, therefore, is that the young talent doesn't get a chance to go in, sit down, and learn. They want you to come in and immediately be productive. So Cal Arts turns out students who can walk in, sit down, and go to work. It takes them a couple of weeks, maybe, to get acquainted with the studio, but they have the background, mechanics, the know-how to start work. Yesterday, you could walk into Disney and sit there for four or five months and they would teach you. They can't do that today because of cost. The smaller studios today, like Filmation, which is very busy, would naturally look to a place like Cal Arts for talent, because in a week or so someone from here can actually sit at the desk and produce.

MARK: *Is the lack of studio proving grounds today reflected in the product as compared to yesterday?*

JULES: It doesn't really matter, because the talent that goes into Filmation or Hanna-Barbara today is as able as anybody else who works there, after-a week or two in the studio. There's no lack of substance in their drawing. In fact, the talent today is far superior than yesterday. I'm talking from experience. They can draw better. There's incredible talent around these schools — they can outdraw anybody! It's just a question of time. It's very important to understand that the talent yesterday, no matter how big they were, I don't want to mention names, they learned everything on the job. They became good after 5, 8, 10, 12 years — they didn't walk into the studio and say "Here — I am a great animator — hire me!" They walked in with a portfolio, and then they learned. But if I call Filmation about one of my students, they look at his pencil test, they hire him on the spot, and next day he's doing layout or storyboarding. Sometimes they'll have a piece of animation that nobody in the studio can handle, and they'll call a student to do it! I'm not making this up, because I had a couple of people here that were doing things that no animator in the industry could do — they couldn't even follow it! That's the difference today.

One of Jules' original storyboard sketches for the "Dance of the Hours" section of Disney's FANTASIA, a hilarious ballet depicting the "rape" of innocent hippopotami by insidious alligators. The arrows suggest directions of movement.

MARK: *What specifically was it these students were doing that the studio animators couldn't follow?*

JULES: Character animation — pure character animation. Better drawings. They could move the camera around the character, under the character, above, below, shooting up — all purely through drawings. They had to call this one student back because no one at the studios could follow up these incredible positions, you know. But it's tougher for new talent today. Yesterday. Yesterday there was no precedent to follow. What the hell, you had KRAZY KAT — that's no big deal, the animators could improve on that, but today when a young talent goes in, they show him PINNOCHIO — see what I mean?

MARK: *Drawn by people like Bill Tytla...*

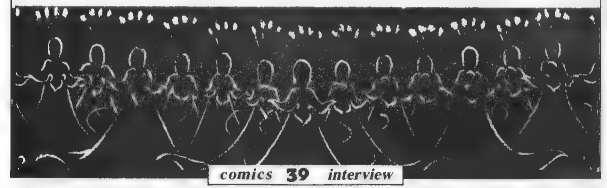
JULES: The older animators now have 20 years' experience, and when the 18-year-old comes in from Cal Arts they show him that kind of stuff.

MARK: *If today's talents are better drawers why is the product so pale compared to golden age animation?*

JULES: Oh, the product looks pale because the budget won't allow it to bloom.

MARK: *So the creators are willing and able to turn out quality, but the studios won't invest the time and money?*

JULES: Absolutely. Whether we like it or not, the best animation around is still Disney, as far as sophisticated animation. They have more money, and they



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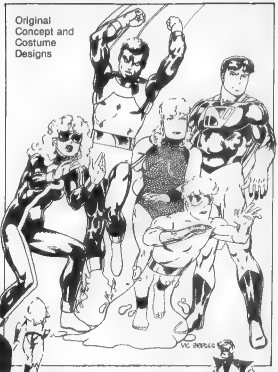

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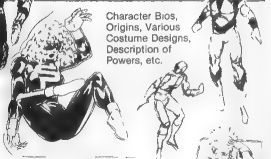

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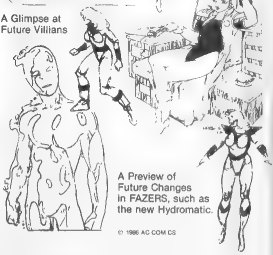

A Glimpse at Future Villians

A Preview of Future Changes in FAZERS, such as the new Hydromatic.

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"I was hired to choreograph FANTASIA."

have to put more effort into their features because they've established a precednet and they have to live up to it. If you're a new studio you have no precedent to follow. If Disney doesn't live up to it everyone's gonna say "Wait a minute — that's not as good as their old stuff!" It's a question of time and money. The talent, today in America, is plentiful. Also, the talent today can go down to the Oxberry camera and shoot their own material if the camera man is sick.

MARK: *What's an Oxberry camera?*

JULES: That's *the* camera. Now, no animator, yesterday, at Disney, Warner Brothers or Hanna-Barbara, could use that. They wouldn't have known what the hell they were looking at. The new talent can do it, he can use an optical printer, he can make the stuff work. Technically, the talent today is far superior. Also, these new people are exposed to much more animation than before. The main thing I tell my people when they go to the studio is to shut up. Don't talk, because they don't like you — you're a student. Give them time and let your work prove you. Because all that exposure from all over the world, they have in their heads. We have 600 animated films here — the best from the 1900's down to today, and if I go to a festival and see something good, we buy it. The exposure is incredible. And the other end of the craft — the editing, the camera, the guys yesterday didn't know a thing. The majority of guys then, even that name you just mentioned, never made even a one-minute film of their own — that's very important.

MARK: *They were just part of a team.*

JULES: They were not filmmakers, they were craftsmen, of a kind. The student from here will go out and show you his five or six minute film, you see?

MARK: *But what's all this talent worth if the studios are not willing to put in equal effort in production?*

JULES: That's a very good question. *(Pause.)* There's always a chance that this young fella might come to a position where he gets his own studio. Many of them from here open their own places, mostly in the commercial field — TV commercials, computer animation, special effects. Some of the best special effects people now working in Hollywood come from Cal Arts. A lot of these people find that the studios won't allow them this extra effort, but at the same time there's always a tomorrow, where all of it can be put to use, maybe on their own films. The majority would like to make their own films, and they do, but at the same time you have to make a living, so they go get a job. And there's nothing wrong with that because they still can use the experience, working eight to ten hours a day. 85% of the people from Cal Arts are working in the field — directors at small commercial studios, or whatever. These students show up prepared — can you imagine, twenty years ago, someone walking into Disney and asking if they had an optical printer?

MARK: *What is an optical printer?*

JULES: An optical printer is the heart of any kind of filmmaking where you need a special effect. Let's say you do a black-and-white film and you want to put color in — you go to an optical printer. It does anything a filmmaker wants to do to the film. You can go inside a 35 mm print and just photograph the middle of it, if you want. If you find the film is too fast you can use an o.p. to slow it down, all kinds of things. We have the best here at school.

MARK: *Let's talk for a while about working with Disney. What did you do there?*

JULES: I was hired, very specifically, to do the choreography of the Chinese and Russian Dances in FANTASIA — the mushrooms and the thistles. At that time the place was very exciting, because that was a beautiful project, and you were young. It was just healthy and good and you felt that this project was of consequence — it deals with music, you could talk to **Stravinsky**, it deals with theatre, it deals with the dance world, it deals with the painter's world — very exciting.

MARK: *And that was what, fifty years ago?*

JULES: *(Pause.)* 45 years, yeah. The problem was, the majority of the people at Disney were locked into a **Norman Rockwell** idea of fine arts — they still are, it hasn't changed. That was the only problem you had, if you had other ideas of fine arts. You had to fight that attitude, but you didn't fight it too heavily because you were surrounded! But you pushed as much as you could, in order to get in the stuff you believed in. In other words, in the Chinese Dance, the mushrooms — notice that the background is flat black.

MARK: *So the colors stand out.*

JULES: Sure! Now, that was an incredible thing — this flat black, which is exactly what I felt it should be — no grass or roots, all black —

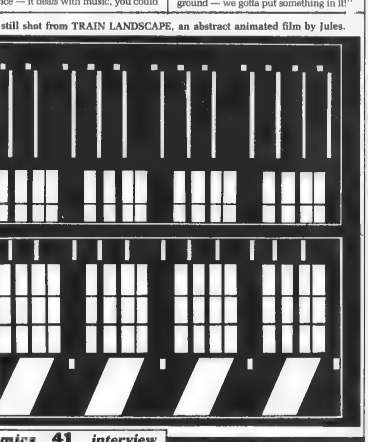
MARK: *Except for the spotlight —*

JULES: And you don't even see the source of the spotlight —

MARK: *Right!*

JULES: You see, at the time that idea was so revolutionary that people thought you were out of your mind! I mean, "You can't have a black card for a background — we gotta put something in it!"

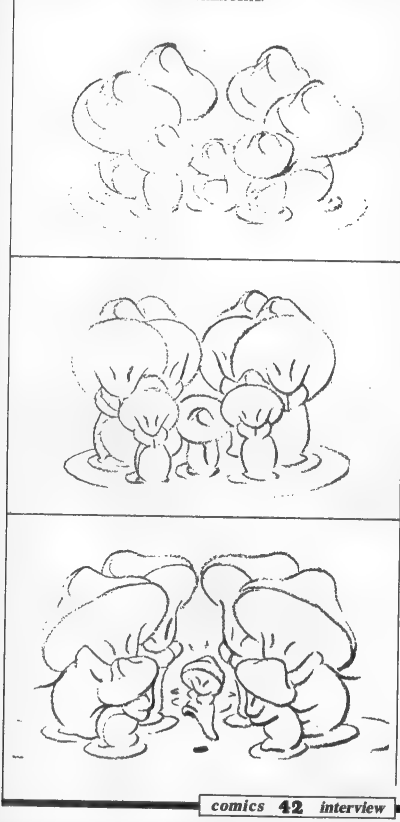
A still shot from TRAIN LANDSCAPE, an abstract animated film by Jules.



© 1988 Jules Engel

"Walt Disney worked strictly from instinct.

Jules' storyboard sketches for FANTASIA's "Chinese Dance," from Tchaikovsky's NUTCRACKER SUITE.



MARK: *But what you did was to focus all the drama right where it belonged — on the mushrooms.*

JULES: Yes, but it was a very difficult fight, because no one around me understood that. But that's why the thing looks so beautiful today, because that black card was left in.

MARK: *How did you manage to pull it off?*

JULES: I think they ran out of money.

MARK: *(Laughter.)*

JULES: You know, I could say something else, but I think it was that they ran out of money.

MARK: *Was that one of the last sequences to be filmed?*

JULES: Yes, and after that, I think, was "Ave Maria." I think they were short of money, and it was a hell of a lot cheaper to go with black.

MARK: *What does it actually mean, when you say you did the choreography for the Chinese and Russian Dances?*

JULES: I was hired to conceive that part of the storyboard, because you had to storyboard the whole thing.

MARK: *Did that involve leading the animators?*

JULES: NO! Let's get something straight — animators have *nothing* to do with ideas or concepts. The animators wait until all the ideas and concepts are completely put together.

MARK: *So you were the idea man?*

JULES: I was the idea man on the continuity of those movements. I had to get it on a storyboard, and when that was approved by **Disney** it went to another department where they broke it down some more and then they called in the animators. The animators did not participate in the concept, or story, or anything else in the animation studio — this is something people ought to get straight in their heads. If you don't have good concept people all the animation goes down the tubes.

MARK: *Were there any other idea people working on those dance sequences?*

JULES: No, no, no. There was a group of about four of us. One man was the head of the unit, and a couple of other people. **Elmer Plumer** did the final sketches. But the problem was, when I was hired by **Phil Dike**, he said they had a problem with two sequences, they didn't know how to put them together.

MARK: *What was the state of the concept when it was given to you?*

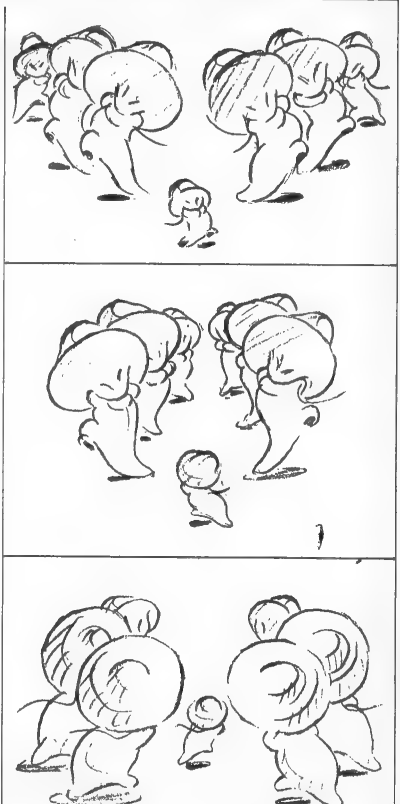
JULES: Oh, it just had mushrooms, which came from what they called the character design department. They had mushrooms on a board.

MARK: *And they told you to make them dance?*

JULES: Oh yeah. Well, they gave me the

He had a kind of aura about him."

music — **Tchaikovsky's** "Nutcracker Suite," the Chinese and Russian Dances.
MARK: *There are some brilliant camera angles in the Russian Dance, all those rows of dandelions dropping in from each side. . .*
JULES: Yes, all that had to be solved on the storyboard. And when the storyboard was solved, then **Walt Disney** came in, and he would say "Okay, now we can move to the next department."
MARK: *So you worked closely with Disney?*
JULES: Yeah.
MARK: *What was he like to work with?*
JULES: I found him very pleasant and very comfortable. He had a kind of aura about him. He had a feeling for things. He worked strictly from instinct, it was never a kind of intellectual activity, which an artist doesn't really need anyway. It was all from the gut, it was gut feeling and he was right! Whether you like the **Disney** stuff or not, you have to give Walt enormous credit because he had a sense of direction. That's very important. He knew what direction he wanted, and even if things were happening outside, let's say someone else was getting a lot of accolades with their material, other studios, **Disney** always said, "That's fine, but it's not *me*." And you have to give him credit for that, he knew what belonged to him —
MARK: *That it wasn't his style?*
JULES: Not his style, but his *feeling*. Walt was all feeling. He *felt* things, you know, and that was it. And out of that feeling came a clear sense of direction, which was right for him, and right for the studio. If you look back now, over Hollywood, fifty or sixty years later, **Disney** is still a giant, and **Cecil B. DeMille** and all those other people, nowadays who ever heard of them? So only two filmmakers that came out of that Hollywood world who still have that kind of popularity today are **Chaplin** and **Disney**. The only two! I mean, look at all the names that you thought, maybe ten, twenty or thirty years ago would be of consequence — and where are they?
MARK: *Well, people still remember Hitchcock.*
JULES: Yes, but don't forget, when you go to see a **Hitchcock** today, you go to an old movie house. **Hitchcock**, CITIZEN KANE by **Orson Welles** — you're not going to see it at a new theatre. But that's never going to be the case with PINNOCHIO or BAMBI
MARK: *Or FANTASIA*
JULES: No, and I'm not a **Disney** — uh, freak, you know? But, dammit, give credit where it's due! See, I worked at U.P.A. for twelve years. I was a member of the original group. We invented



"People called me an egghead – too arty."

Magoo, Gerald McBoing Boing, we did "Madeline" by **Bemelman**, "Unicorn in the Garden" by **James Thurber** — these are classics. So there were only two directions for me — Disney and U.P.A. Because Bugs Bunny is funny, but there was no style, you know. But when an agency came into U.P.A. they would say "We want a U.P.A. style, or "We want a Disney style," but what's a Warner Brothers style — you know?

MARK: *What was the difference between the U.P.A. style and the Disney style?*

JULES: Well, Disney was strictly illustration, to begin with, and heavy on perspective, heavy on presenting the character, building a character like Donald, or Mickey. U.P.A. was different because they worked in contemporary art, they began to introduce the styles of the painters **Matisse**, **Paul Klee**, and **Kandinsky**, in color and concepts — the hell with perspective. In Gerald McBoing Boing you get perspective from shapes and sizes, and the use of color became a very big factor. Also, we wanted to get away from gags, that was killing people at the time. Disney had a style that I would call close to illustration, heavy on presence and personality. You can talk about Bambi or Goofy or Donald. U.P.A. — with the exception of Magoo, who you can talk about — was different.The stories were much more contemporary.

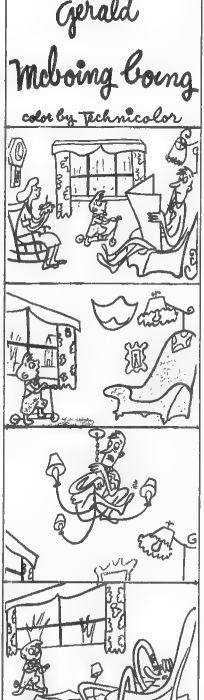
MARK: *Disney worked in illustrated fairy tales.*

JULES: Yes. Disney brought sophistication, and very fine animation, but the animation was always based on a live-action kind of movement. U.P.A., with **Robert Cannon**, whom I considered to be one of the important animators, was different. **Cannon** *invented* movement, in order to give the film style a graphic presence, like the way a dancer invents movement

MARK: *Rather than basing the movement on live action.*

JULES: Right. At U.P.A. it wasn't a question of making it look real, rather it was to make it look like something that's not real, but you will accept. Something that goes beyond real to become an art form. The way a dancer makes a gesture that's bigger than life. I think that good animation is closer to stage acting than to film acting, because on stage the articulation of movement is very important. The problem with today's animators is that they overanimate. Their character moves constantly, it jiggles around, and all that stuff. I always felt that animators should be taught basic theatre acting. Overanimation also comes about because their drawing is so lousy that they're afraid to stop, you know. If you see Boing, Gerald is standing there, the mother is reading a letter, he's just standing — he doesn't move. He doesn't have to move because the drawings are beautiful, well-designed. So when he does make a move it's very meaningful.

This vintage sequence of GERALD McBOING BOING, drawn by Jules, clearly distinguishes UPA Studios' style of sparse expressionistic animation from Disney's lavishly illustrated realism.



MARK: *So today's characters move around a lot in order to cover up the fact that they're lousy drawings?*

JULES: Lousy drawings, and that the animator is not skilled in the art of acting. Even back at Disney.

MARK: *How were you recruited by Disney?*

JULES: They were doing FANTASIA and I had friends there who knew about my love for ballet. They saw my sketches and they said they wanted me.

MARK: *Were you happy with the way the animators executed the ideas you'd conceived for FANTASIA?*

JULES: Oh yes — **Art Babitt** did the animation. The only problem with Art is that he keeps telling people he did the whole damn thing! He forgets that he didn't conceive the choreography or the storyboard.

MARK: *Did you ever remind him?*

JULES: Yes, and it's been a very unfriendly situation. I had problems at Disney because I was fighting a lot of people. They wanted to do the mushrooms like an old M.G.M musical, dance shots with girls, stuff like that, you know, overhead shots like, uh —

MARK: *Busby Berkely?*

JULES: That's the name. These people had never been in a theatre, never seen a ballet, so how the hell do you communicate to them? I was an egghead. At that time, you were either too arty, an egghead, a longhair or too queer.

MARK: *Those terms all meant the same thing?*

JULES: Yes, so I had a lot of problems.

MARK: *Was the studio set up in a way so that you could bypass the small minds and go right to Disney?*

JULES: No, no — you never wanted to do that. Walt came into the room and would talk to the head of the unit. It didn't work that you could bypass someone.

MARK: *It was more of a chain of command, like the army?*

JULES: Yes, and as long as I kept pushing and shoving I got what I wanted.

MARK: *What are you listed as in the credits?*

JULES: Nothing.

MARK: *Just a name?*

JULES: Nothing — I don't even have a name

MARK: *You're not listed in the credits of FANTASIA?!*

JULES: That was politics. The fella who was the head of our unit, I think he was

"I have no listing in FANTASIA."

© 1988 Jules Engel

afraid of me, that I was going to take his job or something, which I was not interested in. We had a very difficult time, because as far as I was concerned, he was just out in the woods.

MARK: *Did you work for Disney after that?*

JULES: Yeah, from there they put me on BAMBI. I did the storyboard, where Bambi meets Faline, his girlfriend. The first time they meet, it's a night shot, they're running around. See, they put me in because you had a lot of movement again. Leaves dropping, the grasses swaying.

MARK: *Ballet type movement.*

JULES: Yeah, so they put me on that sequence.

MARK: *You were the idea man again?*

JULES: Yes, continuity. And color, too. I did a lot of color keying in BAMBI, because I was very good at color, that's what U.P.A. had given me a chance to do.

MARK: *How long does it take for you to develop an idea, like the one for FANTASIA, or BAMBI?*

JULES: To tell you the truth, the drawing for the Chinese Dance I did in two days. I think the Russian Dance I did one afternoon. Very rough stuff. But then it goes to storyboard, and a group came in and told you to work on it a little more. Next thing you knew, six months went by, and then the final thing was done in a week. From there it went to what they called the Music Room, where they broke it down, really, to its essential segments. Then they called in animators, and they picked up the scenes.

MARK: *Does Disney still work like that?*

JULES: Every animation studio must work on storyboards — there is no other way. If you don't solve your problem on the board you're gonna have big budget problems later.

MARK: *What did you do on Magoo?*

JULES: I worked mostly on color. Color was my domain at U.P.A., I was responsible for all the color. I did color because I knew that if I got in there with color I would have total control, whereas an animator would only get bits and pieces. "Madeline" was my idea, "Unicorn in the Garden" was also my recommendation, and "Telltale Heart." And U.P.A. became famous for its color.

MARK: *What happened to U.P.A.?*

JULES: I left in about '59, and took about 60% of the studio with me. We opened up a place called Format Films. That's where we did 26 half-hours of ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS. We designed the characters, though the original idea came from **Ross Bagdezerian**. It was my studio.

MARK: *What do you think the future of animation will be — more commercial or more entertainment?*

Two examples of Jules' ability to inject motion into static drawings. Above: Still frames from ACCIDENT, one of Jules' short animations. Below: Storyboards of "Dance of the Reed Flutes" from FANTASIA.

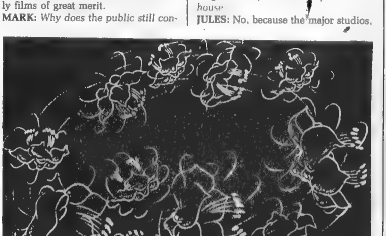
JULES: Disney wants to do one feature every two years. In Hungary, they've done 18 or 20 animated features in the last 8 or 10 years. So there are more animated features in the world now than any other time before, also more independent animators doing excellent work. These animators are working almost like a painter works on a canvas — they don't care what happens, they just want to make films. Some incredible, beautiful films, all over the world. Never anything like it before, absolutely films of great merit.

MARK: *Why does the public still consider animation in the light of Saturday morning cartoons?*

JULES: Not if you go to a festival, like one I was at in Hiroshima recently, or Nashville, Tennessee, some months before. The house is jammed with people. We just had a festival here in L.A., which jammed the place every night. So the public knows. Look — the Museum of Modern Art in New York has been running BUGS BUNNY for the last three months, to incredible audiences. It goes into museums, universities, festivals.

MARK: *But no more short subjects when we go to see a feature at a popular movie house.*

JULES: No, because the major studios,



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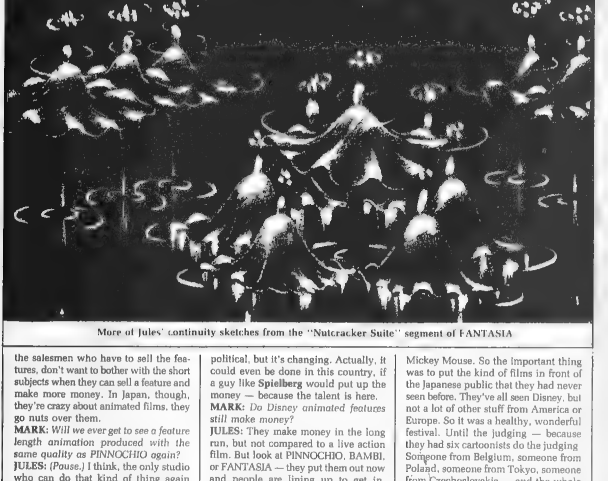
"FANTASIA still plays at major movie houses."



More of Jules' continuity sketches from the "Nutcracker Suite" segment of FANTASIA

the salesmen who have to sell the features, don't want to bother with the short subjects when they can sell a feature and make more money. In Japan, though, they're crazy about animated films, they go nuts over them.

MARK: *Will we ever get to see a feature length animation produced with the same quality as PINNOCHIO again?*

JULES: *(Pause.)* I think, the only studio who can do that kind of thing again would be Disney, or maybe a studio in Japan, if they would hire American personnel to handle the story. Because the technical aspects of the Japanese studios are incredible — it's unbelievable what they can do. But they don't have the same touch that Americans have, the creative personality that's palpable.

MARK: *So if the American creators could get into the Japanese studios, the world might see another PINNOCHIO?*

JULES: No question about it.

MARK: *Because Disney no longer has the depth, the perspective that they used to?*

JULES: No, but that's a question of the storyboard people. The storyboard would have to be done here, and the characters would have to be designed here. Then you can go to Japan to put it all together, because they have the patience and the skill to draw it. Hungary is also exceptional, very good artists, and they've begun to get a sense of humor that the Europeans have lacked before. Their animation has been very heavy, political, but it's changing. Actually, it could even be done in this country, if a guy like **Spielberg** would put up the money — because the talent is here.

MARK: *Do Disney animated features still make money?*

JULES: They make money in the long run, but not compared to a live action film. But look at PINNOCHIO, BAMBI, or FANTASIA — they put them out now and people are lining up to get in. They're timeless. They still play at major movie houses all over the world. The most important consequence in putting together a feature animation is still the story — that's the heart

MARK: *Anything else you'd like to discuss before we sign off?*

JULES: I would like to mention the recent festival in Hiroshima, which was the first animation festival in Asia. I was invited to be on the jury of selection. I represented America. There was a man by the name of **Ranko Munitic** from Yugoslavia, **Antoinette Moses** from England, and two men from Tokyo. What was interesting was that none of us are cartoonists! This wasn't planned, it just happened, and I think because of that it was probably the most meaningful festival of its kind. You see, we didn't care about funny or not funny, story or abstract, we felt that if the material was good, it was in. This would not have happened if they'd have had a group of cartoonists — no way. 99.5% of the cartoonists are locked into Bugs Bunny or Mickey Mouse. So the important thing was to put the kind of films in front of the Japanese public that they had never seen before. They've all seen Disney, but not a lot of other stuff from America or Europe. So it was a healthy, wonderful festival. Until the judging — because they had six cartoonists do the judging Someone from Belgium, someone from Poland, someone from Tokyo, someone from Czechoslovakia — and the whole damn thing fell apart because there were some films that should have at least gotten honorable mention, you know? Not first prize, or second, just honorable mention, but none of that happened because of their narrow heads. At least the material was presented to the public, though — they saw, and that's the important thing. But these judges saw nothing in the other films. This is the big problem with this medium — the animators are locking it into a very small closet, and that's stupid. Because in fine arts you have your **Michelangelo**, **Leonardo**, **Rembrandt**, but you also have **Kandinsky**, **Picasso**, **Mondrian**, you know what I mean? But the animators don't see that — they see **Norman Rockwell**, that's the problem — they're making it smaller. At Hiroshima we tried to open it up, but the judges put it back into antiquity. Imagine if music would have stopped at **Mozart**? You would never have had **Stravinsky**. Or dance — you would never have had **Merce Cunningham** or **Martha Graham**.

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"I try to be the Don Pardo of lettering."

Dave: run this instead of a photo of me... it's my "self-portrait" as a comic ~~book~~ artist.

RICK PARKER

What do missile tests, the Lincoln Tunnel, barroom brawls and the Barking Dog Museum have in common? Rick Parker — the Unknown Letterer. Letterers may be the great unsung heroes of the comic-book industry but in the eye-opening interview with Jim Salicrup, Rick manages to whistle up a few show-stopping tunes of his own...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Rick Parker
Residence: New York City
Education: University of Georgia and Pratt Institute
Favorite President: Jefferson Davis
Favorite Letter:

Pet Peeve: No Pets Allowed.

JIM SALICRUP: Where did it all begin? Where were you born?
RICK PARKER: I was born in Miami...
JIM: Really? I didn't even know you lived there — that you were born there. Are you making this up?
RICK: Actually I'm an android...
JIM: Born in Miami...
RICK: Jackson Memorial Hospital...the doctor's name was Homer. I used to have a dog by that name.
JIM: What year was this?
RICK: When I had the dog?
JIM: No...when you were born.

THE UNKNOWN LETTERER

DO YOU KNOW ME...?
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"BUT I NEVER SIT DOWN TO WORK WITHOUT THIS HANDY LITTLE PIECE O' PLASTIC RIGHT BY MY SIDE...

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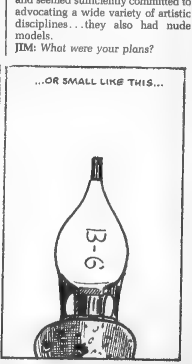
RICK PARKER

"When I got up to Marvel in 1973 I had

RICK: I don't remember. It was a long time ago.
JIM: *And the day?*
RICK: I believe it was a Saturday . . . I could be mistaken. Anyway, a few weeks later they sent me to Savannah, Georgia, to live with my grandmother.
JIM: *When you were growing up did you read comic books?*
RICK: Mostly in the barber's, but when I was little, my grandmother used to read me the "funny pages." When I learned to read, I liked DONALD DUCK.
JIM: *What else?*
RICK: All the EC stuff.
JIM: *Were you drawing then?*
RICK: Since I was old enough to hold a crayon.
JIM: *What do you remember drawing?*
RICK: Frogmen, sharks . . . deep-sea divers, sharks . . . sunken treasure, shark skeletons, sharks . . . later on, I graduated to airplanes, sports cars and Sherman tanks.
JIM: *How did you start out?*
RICK: Well, usually I'd start with the diving helmet, and . . . oh, you mean "What got me started in the first place . . . ?" Both my parents worked and being an only child gave me lots of free time since I didn't have a little brother to beat up on. I used to draw on the cardboard that the laundry put inside my father's shirts.
JIM: *What else were you doing around then . . . reading?*
RICK: When I was five or six we got a television . . . and I confined most of my drawing to school.
JIM: *And then when you were 19 you joined the Army?*
RICK: Not quite. I got drafted.
JIM: *Were you still interested in art?*
RICK: Yes . . . I really got into tanks during that period.
JIM: *Were there any particular role models or artists that you emulated?*
RICK: I was and still am a great admirer of **Jack Davis'** work.
JIM: *Before we leave your childhood, what other kinds of things were you drawing?*
RICK: I had a real penchant for the grotesque . . . alien monsters, laughing skulls with the eyeballs still intact, hatchets in the process of chopping off fingers from a hand . . . that sort of stuff. When I was ten or eleven, six or seven boys in my class at school just "showed up" at our house one day wanting to see my room. In one particular "creative" period I had literally covered the walls of my room with this type of material.
JIM: *So nothing's changed.*
RICK: Only the kids don't come around so much anymore.
JIM: *Do you have any of those drawings left?*
RICK: No. I probably gave them all away or something. During that period I was really into horror movies. I saw every one that came to town. I went to the movies every week.
JIM: *What attracted you?*
RICK: Looking back, I think it must've been the smell of popcorn. I guess I liked being scared.
JIM: *Did those films really scare you?*
RICK: I got my fifteen cents' worth.
JIM: *So you were 19 and got drafted, but you wanted to be an artist. What happened?*
RICK: In the service other guys were always asking me to draw pictures of their wives or girlfriends from these dog-eared photos they carried around in their wallets. When I wasn't doing that, I was making things out of clay.
JIM: *What sort of things?*
RICK: Oh, you know . . . life-size fetuses . . . I even had one cast in bronze. That's it over there. *(Motioning toward table.)*
JIM: *I see . . . where were you stationed in the Army?*
RICK: I wasn't one of those "baby-killers." If that's what you think. I never left the states. White Sands Missile Range.
JIM: *What was that like?*
RICK: Dry . . . very dry. We were involved in field-testing the Pershing missile.
JIM: *What did you do?*
RICK: I lit the fuse.
JIM: *How long were you in the Army and what was your rank?*
RICK: Three years and I was a first lieutenant. Honorable discharge . . . good conduct medal with oak leaf cluster . . .
JIM: *And when you got out what happened?*
RICK: **Eisenhower** died and I went back to school to study art. I studied drawing and painting at the University of Georgia.
JIM: *How was the art department?*
RICK: They had an excellent faculty and seemed sufficiently committed to advocating a wide variety of artistic disciplines . . . they also had nude models.
JIM: *What were your plans?*



never even heard of SPIDER-MAN."

BACK WHEN I FIRST BEGAN WORKING IN COMICS, I USED TO FEEL REALLY GOOD ABOUT MYSELF BECAUSE I'D NOT GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL. I WAS IN STORE MAN...!
I WAS INVINCIBLE!
NO WHEN I FIRST STARTED WORKING IN THAT MACHO STUFF-LIKE CONAN THE BARBARIAN-I BECAME A BIG BRUTE! I WORKED THE BULLPEN LOCKER ROOM PULLING FOR IN'ON
WHEN I FIRST HIT THE BIG TIME, I TOOK A GIANT LEAP FORWARD--
--AND MY SOUND EFFECTS BECAME SHE-SHE!
CRUISING ON ST. JOHN MUSIC WE DISCOVERED
I FELL LIKE
WELL
A REAL AMERICAN HERO!
WITH THE ADVENT OF STAR WARS I FIGURED THE FUTURE WITH ME...
FINALLY PEOPLE WERE BEGINNING TO APPRECIATE ME!!
NO WHEN I GET TO DO THE COVERS FOR SUPER-MAN AND SUPER-GIRL, I'M REALLY BEGIN TO SOAR!
LETTERING ALPHA FLIGHT BROUGHT ME BACK DOWN TO EARTH!
HUMBLED ME
MAYBE WE REALIZE A WEAKNESS, PART OF THE TEAM.
THEN ONE DAY I DON'T KNOW WHY, MY STAR BEGAN TO WANE AND I STUNG MYSELF FLYING
STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE
BY ALREADY OWN MY SELF-ESTEEM NEARLY DISAPPEARED AND AS IT BLEW ALONG EVEN FRAGILE EGO
CON?o
I ONCE SHOULD MAINLY MADE USAGE OF KEY-LINE AND I REGRESSED INTO IMPERFECTIONS AS I STRUGGLED TOUCHING MY FIRST FBI WANTED ADVERTISEMENT!!!
BY THE TIME I ACCEPTED MY FIRST "AMERICOMP" STORY, I HAD BEEN REDUCED TO A MERE SHADOW OF MY FORMER SELF. MADNESS IN CAPTIS' CLOTHING.
BUT NOW, THEY'RE SHOWING THINGS FOR ME AGAIN IN "COMICS SCENE" AND "HEAVY METAL"!!!
NOW WHEN PEOPLE CAN'T AFFORD ME, THEY'RE SMART ENOUGH TO SEND ME SMALL PIECES OF ART!
SAY, WHO'S LETTERING YOUR BOOKS ANYWAY--?

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RICK: I wanted to finish graduate school and get a job teaching in New York.

JIM: *And why didn't you?*

RICK: I didn't smoke a pipe or own any tweed jackets.

JIM: *When did you graduate?*

RICK: I graduated in '72 and immediately moved north to attend graduate school. I decided to delay starting graduate school for about six months with an auctioneer. I saved enough money to begin graduate school at Pratt Institute in early 1973.

JIM: *What made you want to come to school in New York?*

RICK: I wanted to be close to the heart of the artistic community.

JIM: *Where did you live when you moved to New York?*

RICK: Brooklyn, on the fringe of Bed-Sty...has an ominous sound to it...Bed...Sty...that's short of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

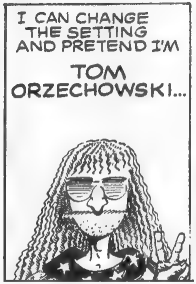
JIM: *Was this with money you'd saved up?*

RICK: Right. Plus I got money from Uncle Sam on the G.I. Bill.

JIM: *How was the instruction at Pratt?*

RICK: In the graduate school you spend most of your time in the studio and the library. I came into the city, New York City, to go to museums and galleries as often as I could.

JIM: *Well, if Jack Abel were here, he'd tell you that Brooklyn is part of New York City and just because everyone in Brooklyn calls Manhattan, "The City..."*



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"I became a taxi driver, at night."

RICK: I had my thesis exhibition in 1974 — November 11, 1974. . . "A day that will live in infamy." Anyhow shortly before, I had begun working as an artist's lithographer at the **Bob Blackburn** Workshop, here in the city, I mean Manhattan. At the time they were located on 23rd Street. Before that, I worked part-time for a designer making tables and chairs in his studio underneath the Brooklyn Bridge. His designs were constructed out of copper tubing and joined together with brass elbows and T's. My job consisted mostly of grinding and polishing the metal parts before assembly. At the end of the day I'd be covered in brass filings and copper dust. My exposed skin areas turned green and stayed that way for weeks after I quit.

JIM: *What happened when you got out of Pratt?*

RICK: I became a taxi driver. I thought it would be a good way to learn my way around New York quickly. . . "learn while you earn," so to speak.

JIM: *What was that like, being a taxi driver?*

RICK: It's a form of Rushin' Roulette. I worked at night when there was less traffic. You could make a little more money, but it was more dangerous. The cars go faster and there are all those substance-abusers out there trying to get'cha. Anytime you drive a car agressively a hundred miles every night through the streets of New York you're openin' yourself up to a wide range of possibilities, many of which are less than pleasant.

JIM: *Like what was happening? Tell me some stories.*

Rick Parker — a letterer a "head" of his time.

RICK: You get into arguments with people from all walks of life. I picked up this guy once. . . I was coming up 6th Avenue one night when I spotted this guy frantically trying to hail a cab. Against my better judgement I pulled over and he got in the back seat. He immediately began saying "TAKE A RIGHT. TAKE A RIGHT." I calmly explained that there was no right turn allowed for several blocks. I made the first right turn I could and asked him again where he wanted to go. "Take me home, man. . ." he said, as if he got a real big kick out of himself. I was not amused. I had some drunk pull that one the previous week. . . but that's another story. We were heading east alongside Washington Square

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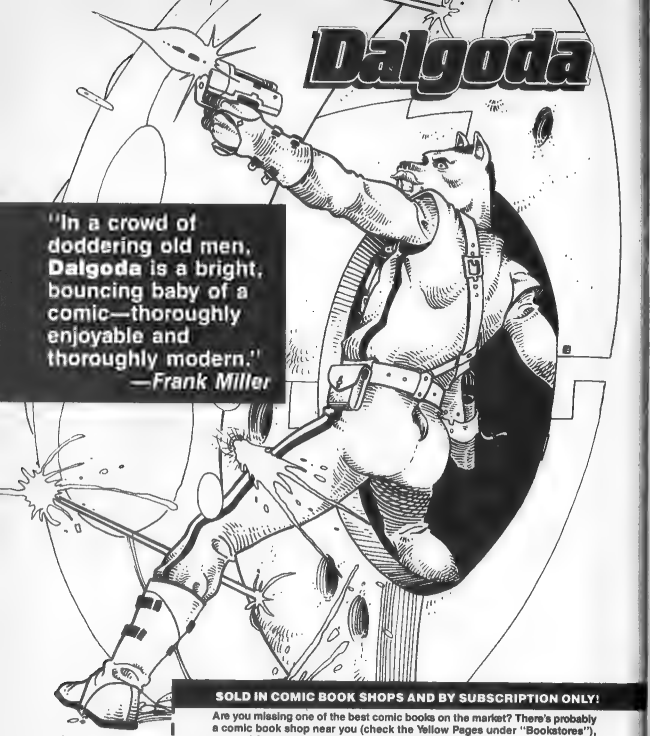
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"He looked at me like I was crazy."

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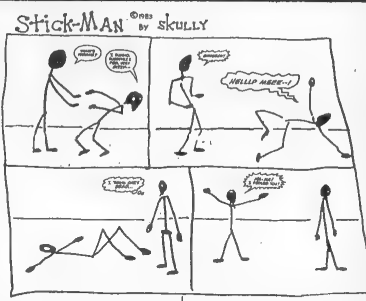
and he still hadn't given me the destination. I asked him again where he wanted to go and he said "The Tin Palace, man . . ." which was located on the Bowery about 2nd Street. I was expecting some kind of hassle as we drove up and just as I drove up to the corner, this guy gets out of the cab and heads for the door of the bar. I put it in PARK and got out to go after him. "Hey, aren't you forgettin' somethin'? I asked. He hadn't paid the fare, which was $1.65. He looked at me like I was crazy and said "What're you talkin' about? I bet you even-up comin' across town and YOU LOST." It was early on a Friday night, I wasn't in the mood for any trouble so I told him to just pay the fare and let me get back to work. He opened up his wallet, took out a one dollar bill, and gave it to me. I said, "Look, the fare's $1.65, gimme another dollar." "I'll match you for it," he says. I took a deep breath and thought, "This guy is really asking for it." I asked him his name. He said his name was Larry. "Listen, Larry," I said trying to sound as calm as possible, "I've got a lot of driving to do tonight so why don't you pay up and let me get on with it?" He took out the other dollar and let it fall to the ground and said with a half-smile on his face "Pick it up . . ." I couldn't believe this guy. The son-of-a-bitch had crossed over the line. I looked him right between the eyes and said "No . . . YOU pick it up." Just to make sure he understood, I began coaxing his right arm gently but firmly toward the ground. I guess he must've been left-handed, 'cause that's when he hit me — right in the



mouth. I swung back as hard as I could, but he ducked back just in time. As he backed up and assumed a fighting stance, I thought to myself "I could kick this guy right in the balls . . ." I decided to kick him in the stomach instead. I made contact. As he doubled over, I grabbed him with both hands and ran about ten feet with him and slammed him into a parked car. I took a step back and kicked him in the side as hard as I could. As I was standing over this guy I suddenly realized there was a large crowd gathered in the barroom window. As I started back to the cab, I noticed this guy's wallet lying on the ground so I picked it up and threw it as far down the street as I could. He picked himself up and started to go after it. I jumped back in the taxi and put it in gear and stomped on the accelerator. At the last possible second, I screeched to a halt a foot from his face. "Next time, don't mess with a taxi driver," I advised him as I drove away. I never saw him again after that, but I still have the stretched and torn dollar bill around here somewhere.

JIM: *Was this before or after the movie TAXI DRIVER came out?*

RICK: "You talkin' to me . . .?" It was 1975.

JIM: *What is the most dangerous part of the job?*

RICK: Oddly enough, it's not the peo-

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"As he doubled over I grabbed him and

ple you pick up . . . I tried not to pick up anyone with a gun. Actually, the most dangerous aspect is the other drivers.

JIM: *Other drivers in general, not other taxi drivers?*

RICK: No, not the other taxi drivers, they're predictable. The worst drivers in New York are the Wrecker Operators. They're the number one worst drivers in my book — with the possible exception of People From New Jersey . . . they're the ones to REALLY watch out for.

JIM: *What other strange things happened?*

RICK: Every day was different. Every day you could look forward to some type of confrontation.

JIM: *Did you ever pick up celebrities?*

RICK: I got stiffed once by **Grace Jones.**

JIM: *What was the biggest tip you ever got?*

RICK: I was coming down Broadway about 98th Street one night when I saw this lady with a suitcase standing by the curb. Anytime you see someone with a suitcase, you think it's going to be a long ride — like maybe to Florida or somewhere. Anyway, she was elderly, so I got out to help with the suitcase, but when I picked it up it was so light . . . I thought it was empty. She got in the back and I put the suitcase on the front seat next to me. When I asked her the destination, she said "Kennedy Airport." As we started the trip out to Kennedy, I said, "Where are you flying to, tonight, ma'am?" "Won't know 'till I get there," was her reply. This more than satisfied my desire for conversation, and spent the next twenty-five minutes or so in silence. As we arrived at Kennedy, we began passing all these signs that read, "Brannif, Gate 6, Pan Am, Gate 3 . . ." so I asked her which airline terminal she wanted. She repeated "Kennedy Airport, Kennedy Airport." *(Laughter.)* We were obviously at the airport, as there were huge jets taxiing over the roadway. I thought to myself, "I'll take her to American Airlines. She was packed pretty light and I didn't want to send her to India or anything. *(Laughter.)* So, I drove up to the American Airlines terminal, and this friendly guy in a uniform opened up her door and said just like in the commercial, "Welcome to American Airlines." I looked at the meter and the fare was thirteen dollars and change. Before I had a chance to say anything, she threw two twentys over the partition and was out of the cab. The guy in the uniform opened up the front door, grabbed her suitcase and I watched in disbelief as the two of them disappeared in the shuffle. I sat there for about two seconds with both the rear passenger door and the front passenger door wide open. Suddenly I knew exactly what to do. I cut the wheel hard left and stomped on the gas and both doors shut simultaneously. I cruised out of the airport and onto the expressway back into Manhattan. That was the financial zenith of my stint as a taxi driver, it was all nickels and dimes after that.

JIM: *When did you decide not to be a cab driver anymore?*

RICK: After about a year, I cut back to working three nights a week and sort of backed out gracefully from the profession.

JIM: *When you were a taxi driver, how much time did you have to spend on your artwork?*

RICK: About an hour a day.

JIM: *How much could you get done in that short a time?*

RICK: Quite a lot, actually. That's when I began using found objects, things I literally "picked up" around town. I got a surprising amount of work done that way.

JIM: *Well, Jim Shooter in the "Bullpen Bulletin" told everyone about the Barking Dog Museum. How did you come up with the name?*

RICK: For the first few years it had no name. It was just a small space in which these unusual exhibits would appear. Whenever someone stopped to look, my dog would bark at them from the other side of the door. In 1980, I decided that the space needed a name so I began calling it the Barking Dog Museum. The name stuck. I even bought one of those signs with the little white letters on it, like they have in hotel lobbies. This enabled me to title each piece on display. The title often funtioned as a part of the piece.

JIM: *After you stopped driving a cab, how did you support yourself?*

RICK: I wanted to work at home in my spare time. I'd been to Marvel Comics in '73 and met a few people up there. It seemed like a fun place to work. **Crespi** suggested that I get together some lettering samples and come

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ran and slammed him into a parked car."

© 1988 Rick Parker

Rick's adoring fans pay him a surprise visit.

back. I came back four years later.

JIM: *When was the last time that you had read a comic book?*

RICK: I hadn't read a comic book since about 1959, and when I got to Marvel I had never even heard of Spider-Man. Someone asked me if I was related to Peter Parker. I didn't know what he was talking about. *(Tapping on door. Opens door. Enter Amo and dogs.)*

JIM: *We're finally up to when he got to Marvel Comics.*

AMO: Oh, no. Did he tell you how he broke down in the Lincoln Tunnel?

JIM: *No. How did he break down in the Lincoln Tunnel?*

AMO: Tell him how you broke down during rush hour.

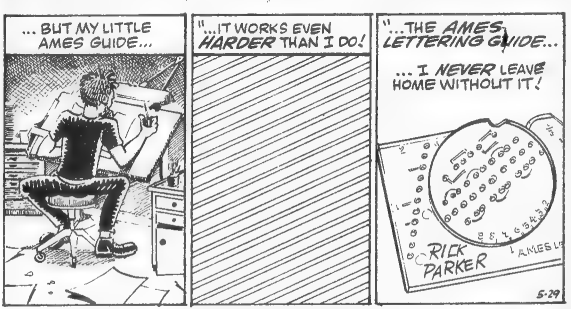
RICK: Gimme a break . . . when I first came to New York I drove up here from Georgia in my '46 Ford pick-up truck. I had been having trouble with the engine overheating so when traffic stopped for about ten minutes in the Lincoln Tunnel, I cut the engine off to let it cool down. When the traffic started up again the engine wouldn't, so there I was sitting in the tunnel blocking about five thousand cars, with everyone honking and cursing at me.

AMO: And everything he owned was in the back of the truck.

RICK: I remember this one guy yelled at me as he passed by, "You'd have to be a hick from the sticks to pull a stunt like that." I found out later that guy was **Bob Camp**.

JIM: *How'd you wind up working at Marvel?*

RICK: I saw an ad in the NEW YORK TIMES. I sent them my resume and they hired me. I started working with **Danny Crespi** and **Jim Novak**. Danny did most of the cover lettering, while Jim and I took care of the insides. It was basically trying to match the various styles of all the other letterers. There was **John Costanza**, **Joe Rosen**, **Irving Watanabe**, **Tom Or-**


... BUT MY LITTLE AMES GUIDE...
"...IT WORKS EVEN HARDER THAN I DO!
"...THE AMES LETTERING GUIDE...
... I NEVER LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT!
RICK PARKER
5-29

© 1988 Rick Parker

"I've done illustrations for billboards."

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zechowski, **Bruce Patterson**, **Bob McCleod**, **Mike Royer** and a few others. When things were slow, I practiced my lettering. I decided as a sample page I would copy the first page of Webster's Dictionary, complete with the drawing of the aardvark and a multitude of different typefaces. **Verpoorten** was sufficiently impressed to assign me a freelance job — HULK #219. I just finished doing HULK #323, so that gives you an idea of how long ago this was. I worked on staff at Marvel for a year-and-a-half before going freelance. I went over to Harvey Comics to see what kind of trouble I could get into over there. It just happened that they needed someone, so I began lettering pages for them.

JIM: *What was that like?*

RICK: It was a smaller operation than Marvel — a family business. **Joe Rosen** came in one day a week. There were artists and writers going in and out.

JIM: *Do you remember who they were?*

RICK: Let's see... **Warren Kremer** and **Sid Jacobson**... **Lenny Herman** was usually there stinking up the place with his cigar... **Ernie Colon** would sit in and draw stories at the office. **Stan Kay**, and some others I don't remember drifted in and out. **Ken Selig** was in charge of striking up the production department with his cigar. Anyway, **Joe Rosen** was the only one I knew, but I ask you does anyone really KNOW **Joe Rosen**? Over at Marvel —

JIM: *Before we get away from Harvey — I want to know everything at Harvey. What were you doing there, lettering comic books or filtering the cigar smoke out of the air with your lungs? Was this a staff job?*

RICK: No, freelance.

JIM: *What was it like working there?*

RICK: Well... it was a GREAT location — they were in the Gulf and Western Building, right next to Central Park. At that time Marvel was located on Madison Avenue at 57th Street, so I could go to all the art galleries along 57th Street inbetween offices. The page size was large and the page rate was small, so you had to do about fifty pages a week to break even.

JIM: *What were the Harvey Brothers like?*

RICK: The name of their company should really have been HARVEY FOR BROTHERS. **Alfred Harvey** ran the place. **Leon Harvey** would sign the checks. Everyone's check had to be personally signed by Leon before he could have it. I used to wait hours for Leon to sign my check. His favorite game was waiting until three minutes before the bank closed. You'd have to make a mad dash to the elevator and try to get it to the bank before it closed. The bank was in the basement of the building and had closed circuit television cameras. I swear Leon used to get his kicks watching the bank employees locking the door in my face on his own private monitor.

JIM: *Were you still working at Marvel when you were at Harvey?*

RICK: No. But I kept working for Harvey after I went back to work full time for Marvel. I went back to work in the Bullpen and continued there for another four years.

JIM: *What was that like?*

RICK: Marvel had increased the number of books they were publishing and there was lots to do. **Jim Shooter** had just become Editor-in-Chief.

JIM: *When you got back and were doing all this lettering were you spending any time on your own work?*

RICK: I continued doing the assemblages and exhibiting to the public. I had a big show in 1980. Some people from Marvel came down.

JIM: *What was your working schedule like?*

RICK: It was a regular nine to midnight job. At five o'clock, when everyone else went home, I would stay at the office and continue working. Anna, the cleaning lady, used to turn out all the lights and lock the door and I'd have to find my way down the hall and out the back door in the dark. **Eliot Brown** would purposely leave things for me to trip over. I started carring a flashlight to work.

JIM: *Why were you working so much at that point?*

RICK: I needed the money.

JIM: *And somewhere along the line you got married?*

RICK: In 1982.

JIM: *What did Amo think of your work schedule?*

RICK: I guess she thought I was highly motivated.

JIM: *The actual lettering, what sort of discipline does that require?*

RICK: Lettering requires a high degree of skill and concentration to do it right. You have to spend long hours at the drawing board. It demands mastery over the materials. That's my feeling. Some people find lettering tedious. It's more difficult than most people realize.

JIM: *Which kinds of jobs would you prefer to letter?*

RICK: My own stories, of course.

JIM: *When you were on staff, what were the good things and what were the bad things?*

RICK: Well, it was fun joking around with the other guys in the Bullpen. The bad part about the job was that you finally get tired of doing all those corrections. I prefer making my own mistakes and it's nice to start out with a blank paper once in a while.

JIM: *When did you start doing STICK-MAN and how did that come about?*

RICK: Back in 1983. I worked on it in my spare time. The approach to draw-

"I had a penchant for the grotesque."

ing fit nicely within the time I had to devote to the process. It was satisfying to be doing something of my own for a change.

JIM: *But then you decided to "stick" with it. How did that develop?*

RICK: I started adding other characters: THE HAPPY, FATMAN, STINKY THE CLAM, PROFESSOR McNUTT and THE HUMAN SPOT. And at the end of the year I published a STICK MAN CALENDAR for 1984.

JIM: *Just to backtrack a bit, you did some comic strips based on a friend of yours?*

RICK: Right. GEORGE. I had been lettering other people's strips, and that format really appealed to me. I decided to try something of my own and base it on a friend of mine, this interesting character I had known for years. That was five years ago and it was a couple of years before I did anything else, comically speaking. I did about a dozen of that particular strip.

JIM: *Going back to the lettering — what was the type of criticism or comments you would get from the people you had to work with?*

RICK: Well, I remember when I was just starting out I did an issue of the X-MEN, I don't remember which one it was, but the script was by **Claremont**. I remember spacing every word out very carefully and really taking extra pains to do a good job. After I had turned it in I was amazed no one had made any comment whatsoever. One day I saw Chris in the hall and asked him how he liked the lettering. He said it was "Okay." I never asked anyone after that. Usually the criticism was along the lines of "letter smaller," or "letter larger." Most of the time it was "letter faster."

JIM: *What was your approach to the lettering? Was it something you took pride in?*

RICK: I believe lettering is an artform. I think the lettering is related to the script in the same way inking is related to the pencilling. I think of lettering as a voice which is heard in the mind of the reader. *I've tried to be the "Don Pardo" of lettering.*

JIM: *I think a lot of people wanted to become artists or cartoonists or comic-book artists, and somehow they started lettering and found that they could get work there. I know when I was going to art school I hated lettering, but there are some letterers, I guess, who get a lot of creative satisfaction from the lettering itself.*

RICK: Balloon lettering is a technique requiring immense skill and concentration. It's much more difficult than most people realize to become a really "good letterer." Designing titles and logos demand a different kind of skill and a greater sense of design, I suppose. Although it was never my ambition to become a letter *per se*, I do believe I've learned a lot from the experience.

JIM: *You've done lots of other things besides lettering. You've taken on all sorts of other assignments — tell me about some of them.*

RICK: Well, I've done front and back covers for MARVEL AGE. I've done illustrations and cartoons for trade magazines, billboards and subways. I've had my photographs published in the VILLAGE VOICE. I just finished something for CRACKED.

JIM: *Which comic strips are you lettering now?*

RICK: RIP KIRBY and PRINCE VALIANT for King Features. "Wolff & Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre" by **Batton Lash** which appears weekly in the NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL.

JIM: *What were some of the questions that you were expecting me to ask?*

RICK: *(Laughter.)* I thought you were going to ask me how I got this scar. *(Pulling up shirt.)*

JIM: *Jesus. . . HOW DID. Oh, never mind. . . Well, I can ask you what your pet peeve is.*

RICK: My landlord won't allow me to have any pet peeves.

JIM: *Who's your favorite president?*

RICK: **Jefferson Davis**.

JIM: *And why is that?*

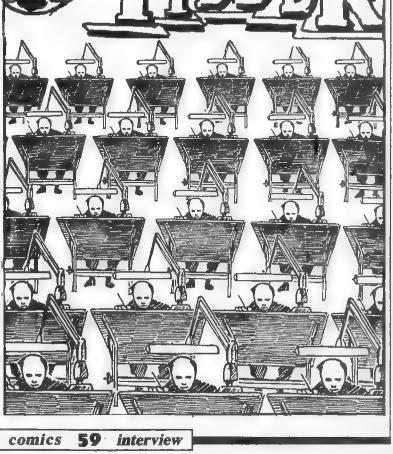
RICK: He was the only president we Southerners ever had.

JIM: *And what's your favorite letter?*

RICK: "X" Who'd read a comic book called the L-MEN? You won't have room to put all of this in that little box.

JIM: *We have plenty of room. We'll make the box bigger.*

RICK: Well, just leave it blank and let the readers put an "X" in it. Ask them to mail it to you and that way we'll know if anyone really reads these interviews.



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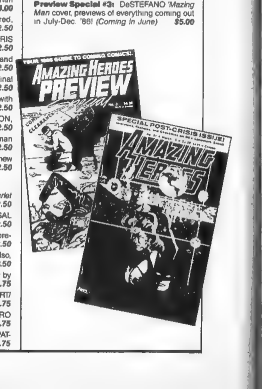

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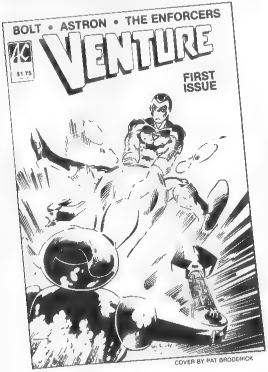

COVER BY PAT BRODERICK

ASTRON
GALACTIC WARRIOR

CREATED BY MARK PROPST

LAST WORD

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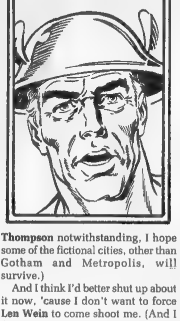
CONTINUITY WITHDRAWL?

Dear Dave,

Why do all the letters in COMICS INTERVIEW start off with something along the lines of, "Gee, issue #26 was the best yet!"? Well, why ever it is, congratulations on a worthy follow-up to your big **John Byrne** issue.

Pat O'Neil's talk with **Marv Wolfman** and **Bob Greenberger**, and those other kinetic DC staffers, answered a lot of the questions I'd had about CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, so I can't thank you enough for having run it. I still feel that the genesis behind CRISIS is a cheat — that a simple desire to clean up the DC continuity is hardly a justification for the destruction of that continuity — but thanks to this interview I now have a clearer understanding of what went on behind the scenes. I'll give them their due, CRISIS is a helluva good story; and that, in the final analysis, is what's really important.

I should explain, I'm not a continuity freak. Sure, it's a nice thing to have, and when a **Roy Thomas** latches on to it the results can be sensational; but I've always maintained that the stories, the entertainment, is the primary concern, and if continuity or anything gets in the way of that then damn it and full speed ahead. The thing of it is this — what's the payoff? They talk about how the complexity of the DC Universe was keeping new readers away from DC and how something had to be done about it, and I believe that was true. But what of the older readers who had no problems with the old continuity, kinked though it was, because of all the time already spent getting to know the old DC Universe and to whom it was special *as it was* — what do we get in return? Sure, it's a damn good story, but what we're getting in return for it is having to start all over again from scratch. I've no doubt that in the long run it will all prove to be worth it all, because I have faith in DC — but for the moment I'll mourn the parallel Earths. They were special to me and I will miss them. (And **Don Thompson** notwithstanding, I hope some of the fictional cities, other than Gotham and Metropolis, will survive.)



And I think I'd better shut up about it now, 'cause I don't want to force **Len Wein** to come shoot me. (And I don't see any reason why, if this new continuity should for some reason prove a mistake, there couldn't be a CRISIS ON FINITE EARTH a few years down the line that could blow it all apart again. Think about it — heh heh heh!)

Shel Dorf's interview with **Stan Drake** is his best contribution to date, and — though for personal reasons I am loathe to admit it — was the highlight of this issue. What a joy it is, the insights this wonderful and perhaps slightly mad — maybe it has something to do with having been named Stan *(chuckle)* — man has given us about himself and his life! I read this and my first instinct was to sit down and write a nasty letter to my local newspaper because it never carried THE HEART OF JULIET JONES — which is something I'm still considering, if only to make a pitch for them to run DOONESBURY.

Bill Chadwick's sit-down with **Josh & Larry Jones** was a pleasant surprise, and another joy to read. I get a real kick out of it whenever you give over page-space to fans. Yeah, sure, vicariousness strikes — but I can't help it, so keep 'em coming. As for the **Joneses**, I couldn't disagree with them more about "the SUPERMAN stuff" — and taken together with the CRISIS interview aren't those remarks curious? — but I can't help but be in love with the whole idea of the "**Jones** Family Comics Universe." Granted, it isn't an entirely original idea — but the extent to which they've taken it! And hey, let's not lose sight of the really important issue here, that this father and son have a great relationship.

And then to the letters and another fine gallery. I was glad to see that **Stephen Bissette** took it upon himself to clear up **Tom Yeates**' misleading statement in CI #22 about **Steve Perry**, but I don't think he went far enough. That particular statement has been bugging me ever since I first read it. I mean, even if what he said about **Perry** had been true, what's the point? Tom, if you're reading this, do you seriously believe that the measure of talent is professional status? That would seem to be what you're saying. I mean, that certainly is a measure, but it is by no means the only one, and there's nothing wrong with anyone anywhere, whatever their situation, having aspirations.

The other thing from the LOC that I want to bring up is this issue of censorship. Dave, you and **T. M. Maple** have been batting this about since, if memory serves, issue #19, and it is an important subject, a matter of great concern. Why have you allowed yourself to go off on a tangent? Enough of this ludicrous debate over "snuff" films and child pornography. I know T.M. keeps bringing it up, but your response to his letters have been damnably vague — forcing him to keep the matter open. State it in clear terms. "Snuff" films and child pornography cannot be dealt with through censorship because they have nothing to do with "freedom of expression." By their very nature they are illegal, or should be, and that is the way to deal with

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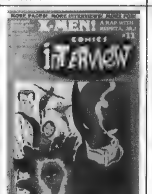

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them — not as an artform deserving to be censored and restricted but as a crime in need of obliteration. If there are gaps in the law through which that stuff can slip then let's close those gaps. Don't censor it; make it criminal. Censorship would only dignify that crap by giving it artistic or journalistic consideration *and* an implied right of existence. I don't think any of us would want that.

Now, if you still want to debate censorship then by all means go right ahead. I welcome it, if you'll only deal with the real issues. T. M. asks whether some censorship is desirable, and even though the examples he cites are invalid — at least as far as I am concerned — the question itself is a valid one. **Ramsey Campbell** (CI #22) spoke at length about the problem they had in Britain over movies on videocassettes bybassing the theatre censors. **J. M. DeMatteis'** MOONSHADOW was restricted by a distributor who refused, because it offended him to handle it. Records and music videos, movies and television programs, schoolbooks and literary classics, they've all come under attack in recent years by people who question their contents. Obviously, there are people who believe that some censorship is desirable, or at least the solution to their problems, and they are working for it and they are getting results.

I happen to believe that censorship is wrong. I don't know what the answer to the problem might be. I know only by what I've observed in this life, but that tells me that censorship is no solution. It doesn't work. It ignores problems rather than dealing with them. It violates individuals' rights to liberty and society's right for truth. Worst of all it invalidates the very nature of humanity to dream and dwell fully in this universe we occupy, and in all of those we don't.

Do you remember CATCH-22? Try this one out for size. People who would be censors don't really know how to do the job, and people who really could do the job don't want it.

Darrel L. Boatz
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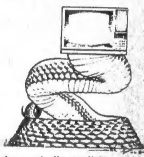

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NEXT ISSUE: Marvel Artist BILL SIENKIEWICZ's electrifying interpretation of FRANK MILLER's ELEKTRA! Maverick inker RICK BRYANT talks of his twelve-year trip to the top! MARTY PASKO looks back and remembers SWAMP THING and more! All this and a great new original Elektra cover in COMICS INTERVIEW #34!

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